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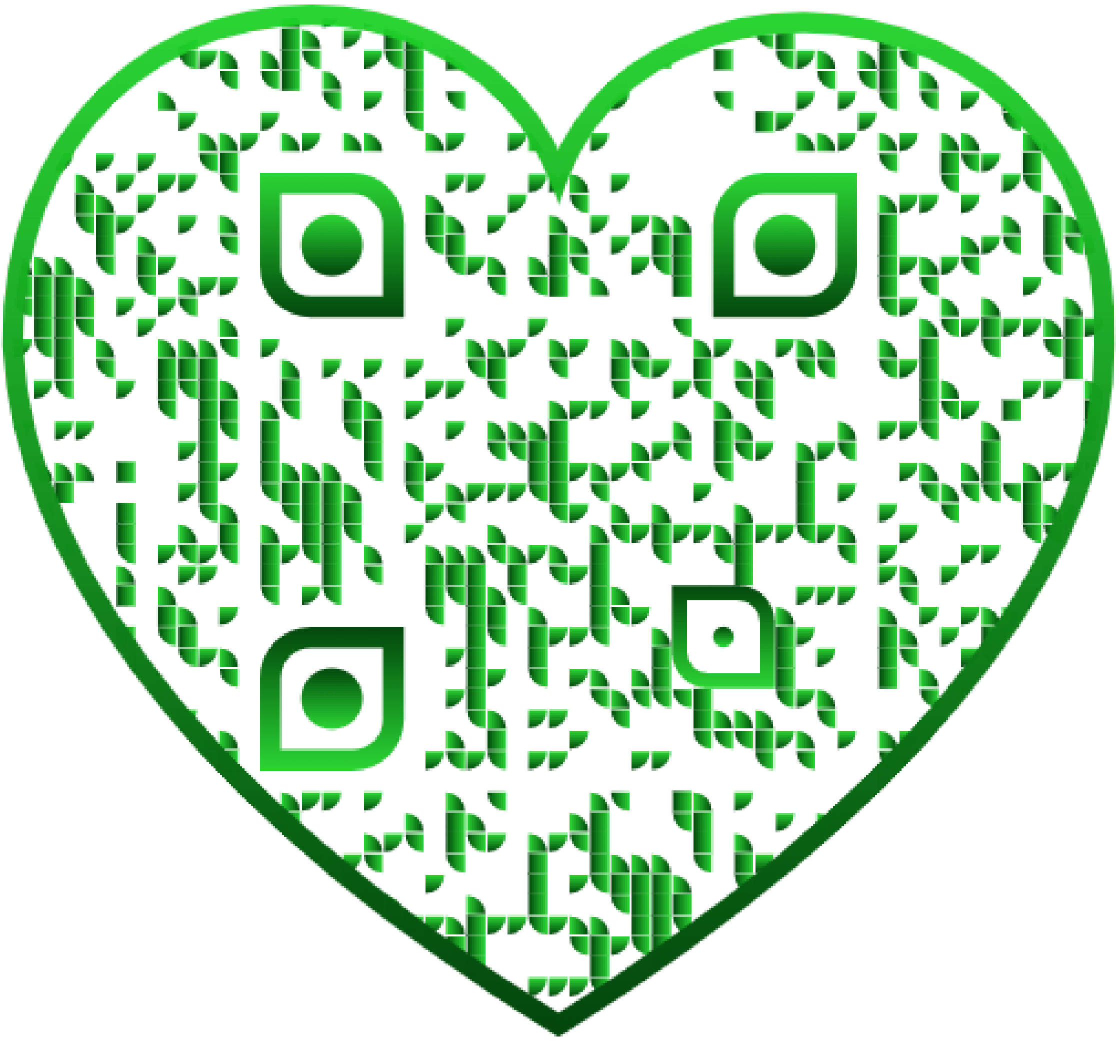

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COMMENT

BUCKLE UP: VOLVO'S ONLY GONE AND DONE IT AGAIN

The automotive industry has spent billions making its cars safer over the years and autonomous driving assistance systems have been at the forefront of that more recently (to varying degrees of reception).

One might think, then, that there was nothing more to be done to improve the trusty seatbelt, a legal requirement in this country since 1983. But this week, Volvo has dispelled that notion by revealing a new seatbelt (p15) that uses sensors to adjust the protection it offers to best suit the size and body shape of the individual using it.

This is particularly compelling to me, because I'm familiar with research that shows women are far more likely to be harmed in a crash for multiple reasons, one being that crash test dummies have long been based on the 'average male'.

It's heartening to see that seatbelt development is ensuring people of all shapes and sizes are safer. There are other developments in the world of seatbelts too, which extend beyond the mainstream. Ford recently announced a seatbelt accessory called SupportBelt, which has been designed for people recovering from mastectomy surgery. It spreads the load so the pressure is relieved on painful scars.

Little bits of progress, but progress nonetheless, all of which is making the world a better place.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

Carbonfibre-clad M2 CS

Stripped-out, track-ready 523bhp coupé is ready to tear up the Nordschleife. Jonathan Bryce shows you round.

do nothing you know

BTCC stars name their idols

Watch some of our favourite BTCC drivers explain who their heroes are and why they love them – from F1 icons to superbike racers.

Every GM V8... ever

Sit down with a cup of Joe as we take a look at the highs – and lows – of GM's V8s, including Caddy, Oldsmobile and a few surprises.

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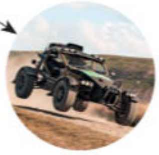
"The Nomad takes to the jump on the Mile Loop like some magic La-Z-Boy armchair" p44



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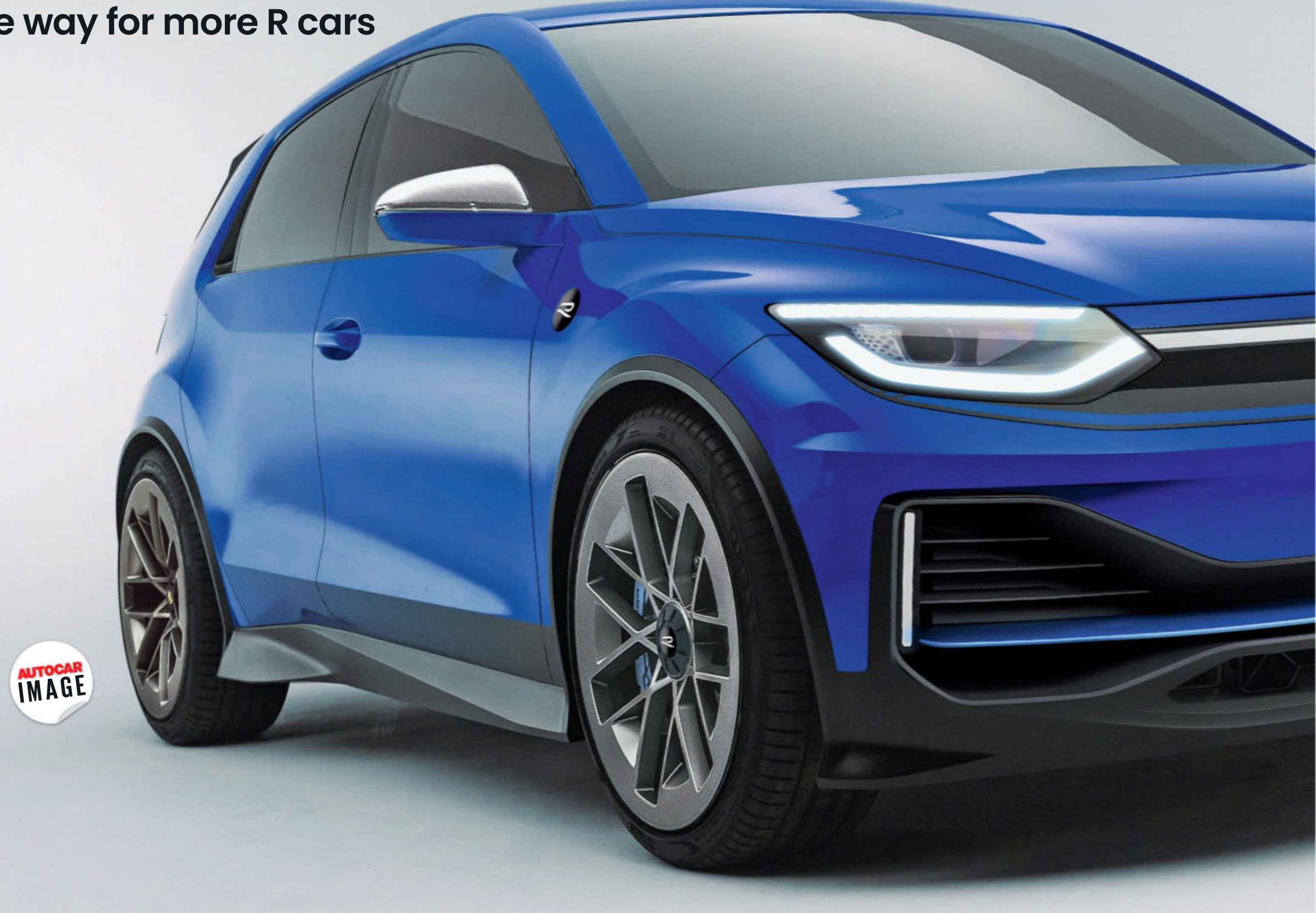
VW PLOTS 400BHP ID 2 R WITH IN-WHEEL MOTORS

Four-wheel-drive performance EV will sit above ID 2 GTI and pave way for more R cars



Volkswagen is exploring plans for a high-performance ID 2 R, which could be its first model to use in-wheel motors as part of a new four-wheel drive system.

The hot hatchback is claimed to be part of a broader engineering initiative, led by the R performance brand, to explore the potency and torque-vectoring potential of hub motors. If given the green light, the ID 2 R would sit above the already announced ID 2 GTI – and potentially even be pitched against the mega-powered Renault 5 Turbo 3E.

The drivetrain under consideration for the ID 2 R retains the front-mounted electric motor and power electronics of its GTI sibling but adds two independently controlled electric hub motors within the rear wheels. This would provide a significant boost in performance and four-wheel drive without compromising boot space.

Volkswagen officials have confirmed the ID 2 will make its debut in 2026, with the heavily related ID 2 crossover arriving in 2027.

Sources at the firm's Wolfsburg HQ in Germany suggest the potent R version is being developed with input from a technical partner based in the Balkans that is believed to specialise in lightweight, high-output in-wheel motor systems. Combined with predictive torque distribution, brake-based yaw control and dynamic drive modes, the system is claimed to offer genuine hyper-hatch performance and agility without the bulk and cost of a conventional dual-motor set-up.

However, Autocar has also been told that it would not require expensive

In-wheel motors would open the door to a potent Golf R successor

ID76 Z2X
AUTOCAR IMAGE

'ID 2X' could become a baby off-road EV with space-efficient 4WD

modifications to the ID 2's 'MEB Plus' platform to accommodate a second, rear-mounted motor, should VW opt to offer the same performance from a more conventional set-up instead. The smallest MEB-based car currently available with dual motors is the Skoda Elroq vRS, which is 400mm longer than the ID 2 concept.

With the front-wheel-drive ID 2 GTI set to deliver as much as 286bhp, it is expected that the ID 2 R will deliver in the region of 400bhp or more from its trio of electric motors.

Volkswagen's R division is understood to be focusing on minimising the weight penalty, ensuring the ID 2 R remains relatively light and responsive by class standards while delivering the traction and acceleration expected of a four-wheel-drive model – hence the experimentation with lighter in-wheel motor technology.

The target is to match or exceed the performance and handling of today's warmed-up GTX EVs, such as the ID 3 GTX, but with a smaller footprint and at a more affordable price.

R division insiders hint that the ID 2 R could receive bespoke bodywork, chassis tuning and interior elements to distinguish it from the upcoming ID 2 GTI. Though not officially confirmed, it is seen as a spiritual successor to the 151mph Polo R WRC hot hatch of 2012 and a showcase for affordable electric performance technology.

The implications for the rest of the MEB Plus line-up are equally significant. By packaging the rear drive components entirely within the back wheels, VW can extend four-wheel-drive capability to compact crossovers and SUVs without packaging compromises. That could pave the way for the ID 2 crossover to be offered as a baby off-roader, like the upcoming dual-motor Renault 4 and Fiat Grande Panda.

This approach could also allow four-wheel-drive variants of future Volkswagen electric models, including the electric Golf – based on the next-gen SSP architecture – to retain the same boot volume, floor height and interior flexibility as the front-driven derivatives.

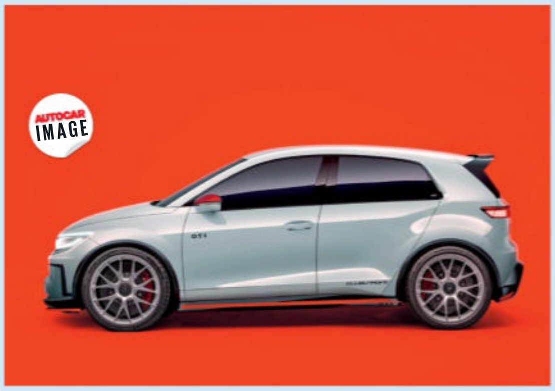
It is also claimed to help streamline platform-sharing, giving Volkswagen the ability to build front-, rear- and four-wheel-drive models on a single architecture with minimal hardware divergence.

GREG KABLE

IN-WHEEL MOTORS COULD BE A GAME-CHANGER **FELIX PAGE**

So far, there's been limited success in exciting keen drivers with electric hot hatches. All too often, they don't compensate for the efficiency penalty that comes with extra power with scintillating dynamics or overt charisma. Plus, all EVs are fast off the mark, so trimming a second or two off the 0-62mph sprint doesn't win cars such as the MG 4 XPower (pictured) the same bragging rights as their petrol predecessors.

But in-wheel motors look like changing all that. Tightly packaged, highly controllable and relatively light, they should allow hot EVs like the ID 2 R to be tangibly differentiated from cooking counterparts with bespoke performance and dynamic traits. And if they can do that without denting boot capacity, cabin space or rolling efficiency, then they could be no less than the saviours of the hot hatch.



CLUBSPORT ID 2 GTI WILL BRING OLD-SCHOOL FEEL

VOLKSWAGEN IS ALSO developing a hardcore Clubsport version of the upcoming ID 2 GTI, according to insiders.

The front-wheel-drive ID 2 GTI, revealed in near-ready concept form, is due on sale towards the end of 2026 with around 223bhp from VW's new-generation APP550 electric motor. But Autocar has learned that engineers at VW's research and development centre in Braunschweig, Germany, are also working on a more potent and focused range-topper, targeting a peak output of 282bhp.

Alongside the additional power, this flagship – in keeping with the hot Golf Clubsports that have gone before – is being conceived with a series of mechanical and electronic upgrades.

Chief among them is a fully mechanical limited-slip differential, which offers torque-vectoring capability between the front wheels. "We're not working with brake intervention," said one source. "It's a fully mechanical system."

Further upgrades under consideration include variable torque delivery and a virtual gearchange function. Together, these systems modulate how quickly torque builds with speed and throttle input to reduce jerkiness under hard acceleration while replicating the stepped response of a traditional manual gearbox.

Both ID 2 GTI variants will be based on the MEB Entry platform (internally known as MEB-21) and are expected to use the APP550 motor also used in other recently unveiled or upgraded Volkswagen EVs.

"We're arriving late, but with force," said one Volkswagen insider.

Although a launch date has yet to be confirmed, the ID 2 GTI Clubsport is expected to follow the template set by previous Golf GTI Clubsport models, which have historically offered more power, sharper chassis tuning and limited-edition status over their standard GTI counterparts.

The first Golf GTI Clubsport was launched in 2016 to mark the GTI's 40th anniversary and was followed by the Clubsport S – then a Nürburgring record holder with a stripped-out interior and manual gearbox.

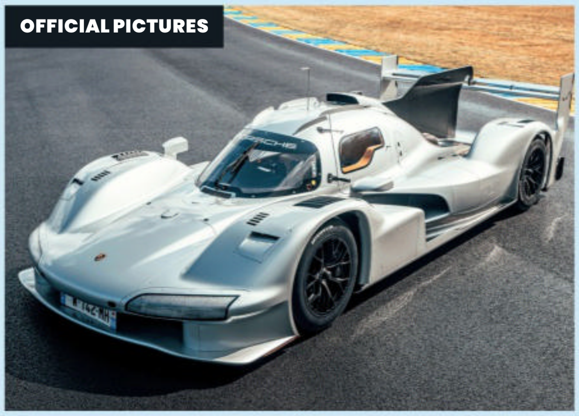
The current Golf GTI Clubsport is powered by a 296bhp 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol engine and features bespoke ECU mapping, chassis upgrades and adaptive suspension tuning. It is positioned as Volkswagen's fastest and most advanced front-wheel-drive hot hatchback to date.

ID 2 GTI Clubsport will follow formula used for past Golfs

OFFICIAL PICTURES

ELECTRIC GLC USHERS IN NEW ERA FOR MERCEDES

EQC SUV successor arrives in September with next-gen look and tech



OFFICIAL PICTURES

PORSCHE CREATES ROAD-GOING 963 ENDURANCE RACER

PORSCHE HAS CREATED a road-legal version of its successful 963 endurance racer, rekindling the spirit of a road-going Le Mans legend from 50 years ago.

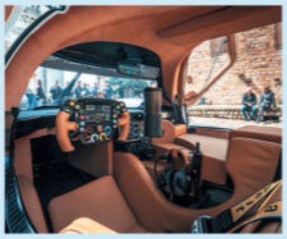
The 963 RSP is inspired by, and specified to match, the road-legal version of the 917 racer that Porsche built for Italian aristocrat and heir to the Martini drinks empire Gregorio Rossi di Montelera in 1975.

Like that car, which still appears regularly at events like the Festival of Speed and Villa d'Este, the road-legal 963 is all but technically identical to its racing counterpart, which will compete at Le Mans this weekend.

Porsche's LMDh prototype uses a 671bhp hybrid drivetrain centred on a 4.6-litre twin-turbocharged V8 – itself derived from the 918 Spyder hypercar's engine.

Performance figures have not been revealed but, given the 963 racer's estimated 0-62mph time of around 3.0sec and a top speed of more than 205mph, the RSP should be one of the fastest Porsches yet to wear a numberplate.

As well as competing in the WEC, the 963 is a regular fixture at the top of the standings in America's IMSA endurance series, where it is fielded by Porsche motorsport partner Penske – the owner of which, Roger Searle Penske, has commissioned the road-going car, hence its RSP moniker.



To ensure it can be driven on the road, Porsche has equipped the 963 with indicators and brake lights, put the suspension in its highest setting, fitted less extreme wet-weather tyres and subtly reworked some of the more track-focused bodywork. The vents on the front wings, for example, have been covered so the wheels don't throw stones back at the windscreen.

Despite being road-legal in certain countries, the 963 RSP still needs a laptop to get it started – unlike Rossi's 917 (pictured below), which had a conventional ignition key.

Porsche will show off the RSP on the sidelines of La Sarthe this weekend before bringing the car to the UK in July for the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

The company has told Autocar that the car – understood to have cost in the region of €5 million (£4.2m) – is a one-off for now but that it would not rule out building another if approached.

A racer on the road

Electric GLC is the first Mercedes to use the crucial MB.EA platform

Bold, upright grille is visible despite the camo and signals new look

Disguise will come off the electric GLC at the Munich motor show

Rear-drive cars offer up to 435 miles of range; 4WD GLC has 482bhp

Mercedes-Benz's crucial new electric GLC has entered the final stages of its development ahead of a public debut at the Munich motor show in September.

The Stuttgart manufacturer has released new official pictures of its rival to the upcoming BMW iX3 (driven, p24), which not only marks the company's next step in electrification but also serves as the first passenger car model to introduce a bold new design language.

At the heart of the design shift is a taller, more upright grille, inspired by historic models like the Ponton – the predecessor to today's E-Class. Mercedes design boss Gorden Wagener said the move is about giving future models "a strong identity" at a time when many electric cars are beginning to look alike.

"Our grilles will remain a key identifier, but they will become taller and more prominent," he told Autocar.

The ideas underpinning the new design lineage, which will introduce an illuminated grille frame among other new features, were first previewed by the Vision V concept car at the Shanghai motor show in April.

As well as ushering in a new design, the electric GLC will be the first model based on Mercedes' new MB.EA platform – a dedicated electric car structure that will also form the basis of the upcoming electric C-Class. It supports an 800V electric architecture, with an expected maximum charging speed beyond the 320kW of the new, MMA-based CLA saloon.

Mercedes officials have confirmed that the electric GLC – successor to the discontinued EQC SUV – will receive a 94.5kWh battery and up to 435 miles of WLTP range in rear-wheel-drive form.

Standard electric GLC models will use either a single-motor rear-wheel-drive or dual-motor four-wheel-drive powertrain – the latter of which is set to offer up to 482bhp.

An AMG performance flagship is due in 2027 with a combination of axial-flux motors that generates up to 600bhp, according to sources at the German car maker.

GREG KABLE

LE MANS ASTONS FOR SALE

It's not just Porsche (left): Aston Martin is offering 10 well-heeled customers the opportunity to own their own version of its Valkyrie Le Mans car.

Unlike the Porsche 963 RSP, the Valkyrie LM is restricted to track use, and is all but identical to its WEC counterpart – down to the 6.5-litre Cosworth V12 engine.

Aston will store and transport the cars as part of a dedicated track support programme to give owners "the ultimate top-flight motorsport experience", which includes car set-up, driver training and data analytics.

EMIRA RECEIVES TARGETED UPGRADES

The Lotus Emira has been updated with several refinements that promise to deliver both a more engaging drive and greater comfort. The £96,500 V6 model gains retuned dampers and alignment settings, plus new gearbox mounts and a tweaked cooling system. Meanwhile, the four-cylinder Emira Turbo, from £79,500, has a quicker-shifting dual-clutch gearbox.

OFFICIAL PICTURE

HONDA TURNS TO HYBRID TECH FOR 13 NEW MODELS

Highly efficient new-era hybrids will take up the slack of slow EV sales

Honda is readying a wave of new full-hybrid models powered by what it calls "the world's most efficient" combustion-engined powertrain in response to lagging electric car sales.

At least 13 new Hondas will arrive between 2027 and 2030 in a revised range of hybrids, probably starting with replacements for today's Civic and Jazz.

The new cars will help the Japanese firm to navigate the "transition period" until EVs are suitable for mass adoption. The move is a response to the speed of changeover to EVs, which has so far been slower than Honda expected.

Announcing the change in strategy, Honda CEO Toshihiro Mibe noted that "demand for hybrid-electric vehicles is growing", while "the expansion of the EV market has fallen behind the initial projection".

Mibe suggested the relaxation of CO_2 emissions and EV sales targets in the US were to blame for the slower than expected growth of EVs, because these were "the main premise for the widespread adoption of EVs".

Honda has not said which cars will be first to receive the new powertrain but has confirmed that it will come in 1.5-litre and 2.0-litre forms. That matches the capacities of the engines in the current Jazz and Civic, which are both due substantial updates in the coming years.

The 1.5-litre version will provide peak torque over a rev range that's 40% broader than currently to maximise efficiency without compromising grunt.

Both versions will deliver the best thermal performance of any ICE on the market, claimed Honda.

Meanwhile, the hybrid system's electric motor is being slimmed down to reduce weight and improve packaging.

Combined, the new developments will yield a 10% improvement in fuel economy. For reference, the current 1.5-litre Jazz returns 62.8mpg while the 2.0-litre Civic manages 56.5mpg.

The arrival of the new powertrains will coincide with a new platform that promises improvements in driver engagement, comfort and safety.

For medium-sized cars, it will be 90kg lighter than the current structure, and the bodies applied to the frame will bring a further 10% saving in mass.

Cost-cutting is also a key directive in the development of Honda's upcoming cars. Models based on the new platform will share at least 60% of their parts, such as the engine bay and rear floor. The new hybrid powertrains, meanwhile, will be 30% cheaper to produce than those launched in 2023.

CHARLIE MARTIN

Jazz is likely to gain "world's most efficient" combustion powertrain

EURO EMISSIONS REGS KILL CIVIC TYPE R

New Ultimate Edition is Type R run-out special

The Honda Civic Type R will soon be removed from sale in the UK and the EU, due to new and stricter Euro 6e-bis emissions regulations.

Honda said it would pull the hot hatch at the start of 2026 because "the industry is changing and our model range is having to evolve with it in accordance with European legislation".

The demise of the Civic Type R will also benefit Honda's bid to meet tightening fleet emissions standards against a backdrop of selling just one electric model, the e:Ny1 crossover. The Type R was the brand's highest polluter, at 189g/km of CO2, compared with the 114g/km put out by the regular hybrid Civic.

The Civic Type R will bow out as the Ultimate Edition, which bears a livery commemorating the model's signature Championship White and red scheme. Just 40 will be built, of which 10 are UK-bound. They will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis and prices are expected to exceed £50,000.

The Civic Type R will live on in the US, Japan and other overseas markets, and Honda has committed to offering high-performance models in the future.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

SPECIAL McLAREN 750S MARKS F1 GTR'S 1995 LE MANS WIN

McLAREN HAS MARKED the 30th anniversary of its victory at the 24 Hours of Le Mans with a special-edition 750S that channels the F1 GTR.

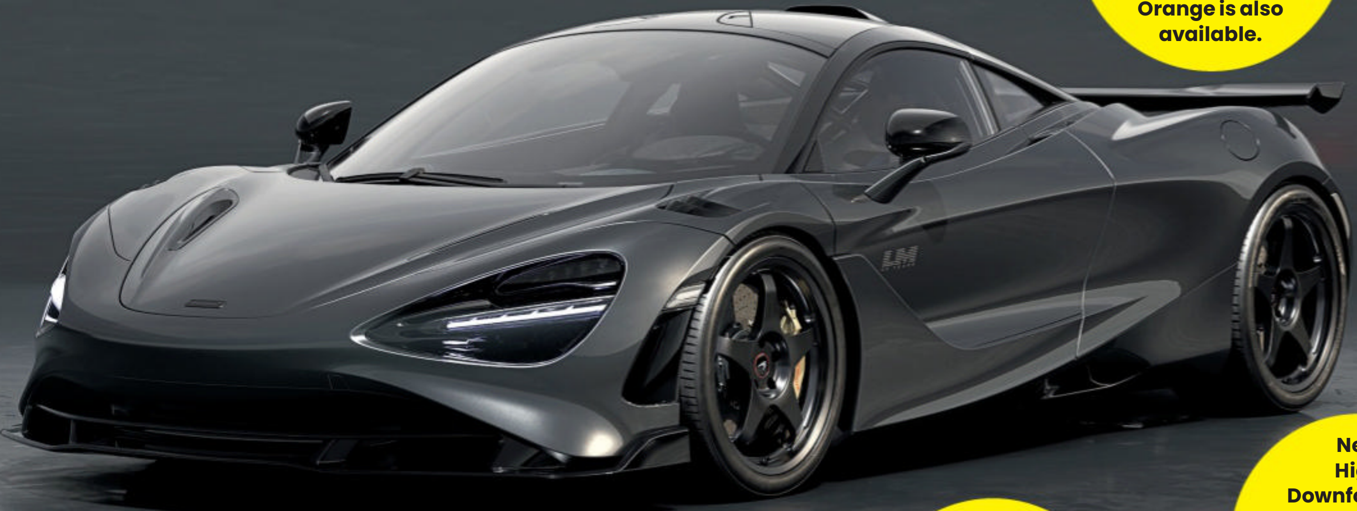
Revealed two years ahead of McLaren's return to the top class at Le Mans, the new 750S Le Mans is modelled on the car (right) that claimed the British firm's first and only overall win at La Sarthe in 1995.

Just 50 will be built, priced well clear of the £250k standard 750S and marked out by a raft of bespoke design and interior elements.

59
TOKYO
Ueno Clinic
KENWOOD
DEGREE 7
MICHELIN

Carbonfibre roof scoop boosts cooling for the 740bhp 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8.

Le Mans Grey paint matches the livery that adorned F1 GTR number 59, which took a close victory at Le Mans. Trademark McLaren Orange is also available.



New High Downforce Kit includes an active carbon rear spoiler and a chunkier front splitter to boost downforce by 10%.

Alcantara-heavy cockpit, offered in a choice of race-inspired colour schemes, gets Le Mans badging and a build plaque.

F1 GTR-inspired five-spoke wheels, with Le Mans branding and blue and red centre locks, cover brake calipers finished in F1 Gold.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

GENESIS GV90 TO BE PLUSH SIX-SEAT EV RIVAL TO EX90

SPY SHOTS

GV90 retains the imposing silhouette of concept (below)

GENESIS IS RAMPING up to launch an electric luxury SUV to rival the Volvo EX90.

The GV90 is effectively Genesis's take on the Kia EV9 and Hyundai Ioniq 9, sharing its fundamental platform and innards with those family-focused seven-seaters but applying a premium sheen.

As prototypes hit the Nürburgring in preparation for a 2026 launch, it is clear just how loyal the GV90 remains to the design of the imposing Neolun concept that Genesis revealed last year.

Show car flourishes such as the reverse-opening rear doors are unlikely to make production but the Neolun's imposing, monolithic silhouette is heading to showrooms unaltered, along with the twin wraparound LED light bars at each end.

Like its Kia and Hyundai siblings, the GV90 is expected to offer three rows of seats. But in line with Genesis's premium billing, it's likely to come exclusively with a six-seat arrangement, with a rotating middle row for a more social layout.

Allowing for slight variations in power output and efficiency figures, the GV90's specification is expected to roughly match those of the Kia and Hyundai. So expect a maximum range in the mid-300s, charging at up to 350kW and a top-end power output that could tally with the 510bhp EV9 GT.

WHAT IT MUST BEAT

LUCID GRAVITY
828bhp, 450-mile range, 400kW peak charging rate. Not in the UK yet.

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER SE
Ditches retro cues for futuristic styling. Due in 2026 with 600-mile range.

VOLVO EX90
Software-focused SUV is an XC90 EV with long legs and plenty of pep.

Fusilier concept, with Ineos group CEO Jim Ratcliffe, is a close V27 fit

INEOS EYES CHERY TIE-UP TO HASTEN FUSILIER REx LAUNCH

Deal to use iCaur platform is being explored by Ineos to lower CO$_2$ ASAP

Ineos Automotive is in talks with Chery to build cars on a range-extender (REx) EV platform from the Chinese group's iCaur off-road brand, Autocar has learned.

The tie-up would allow Ineos to move quickly to develop its postponed Fusilier REx off-roader and expand its line-up beyond the slow-selling Grenadier combustion-engined off-roader.

The launch of the Fusilier would give Ineos a crucial low-CO$_2$ model that would allow it to comply with emissions regulations in both the UK and the European Union.

Currently, the company manages the regulations by selling some Grenadier models as commercial vehicles, thus ensuring it stays within the lighter-touch rules for low-volume manufacturers.

Ineos is expected to repurpose iCaur's upcoming V27, an off-roader that uses a 1.5-litre turbo engine as a generator when the charge from its battery – either 22kWh or 33kWh – is depleted. At 4.8m long and just under 2.0m tall, the V27 is larger than the Fusilier concept revealed last year but still smaller than the Grenadier.

The all-wheel-drive version packages an electric motor on each axle and produces up to 449bhp, iCaur has said.

Ineos declined to comment when approached by Autocar.

In May, iCaur CEO Su Jun released a picture of himself standing with a prototype of the V27, asking social media followers whether they agreed with comments that it was "the national version of the G-Class" or the "new-energy Land Cruiser".

The iCaur brand is targeting sales in the UK and mainland Europe from early next year with a range of models starting with the V23, a small electric SUV. Subsequent models will include the V25 and a planned new 'V21' to rival the Jeep Avenger.

Chery CEO Yin Tongyue said in April last year that "two premium marques" in Europe wanted to use Chery platforms and the firm was in talks with two others. One of those premium brands was Chery joint-venture partner JLR, which has since announced that it will revive the Freelander brand in China using Chery's T1X platform, shared with Chery brands Omoda and Jaecoo. The other premium marque looks set to be Ineos.

Fusilier concept was mothballed but a revival now looks on the cards

V23, seen here in pick-up form, will be the first iCaur model to go on sale in UK

ALMOST BEYOND BE-LEAF

Nissan has supplied 84 Leaf batteries to a new energy storage facility for Rome's Fiumicino airport. Totalling 2.1MWh, the old 40kWh packs have been combined with solar panels to generate 31GWh of power.

MOKKA, EXTRA HOT, PLEASE

Vauxhall is about to reveal its hottest hatch since the wild Corsa VXR Nürburgring. The Mokka GSE is a 278bhp EV crossover with a slippy diff and an apex-hunting chassis makeover. Its debut is due in a few weeks.

Disguised V27, with iCaur CEO Su Jun, is a 4.8m-long REx 4x4

Renault Group CEO Luca de Meo also visited Chery's hometown of Wuhu earlier this year and showed interest in the iCaur V23.

The iCar brand – which was forced to rename itself iCaur for exports to avoid a legal clash with Apple – has been a hit in China after the launch of the V23. The brand plans to repeat that success overseas and has set a goal of opening 2000 showrooms in 100 countries within three years.

Chery is very open to deals with European car makers. In Spain it has signed up with local brand EV Motors to sell its Tiggo range of SUVs under revived Spanish marque Ebro. Meanwhile, the same cars in Italy are badged under the local DR brand.

Both tie-ups involve an element of local assembly, with Ebro's cars sent over as partially built kits and finished in Nissan's former Barcelona plant.

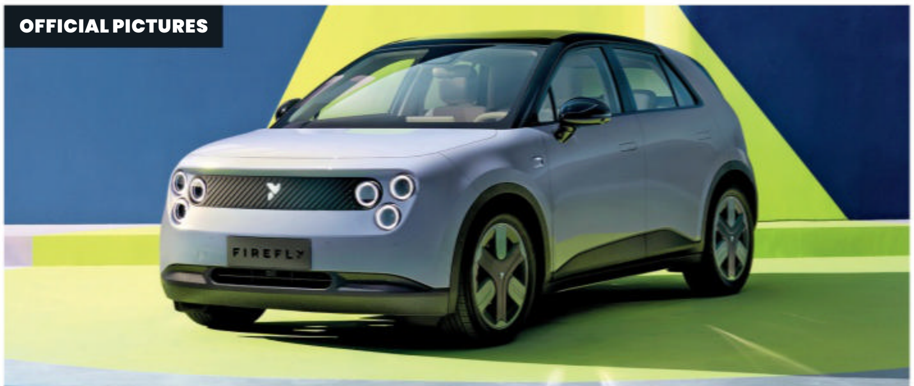
Ineos could be expected to repurpose its former Smart car facility in Hambach, France, to build the Fusilier model from iCaur kits sent over from China. Extended-range EVs are included in the EU's increased tariffs for China-built EVs, but assembling the cars in Europe could enable Ineos to circumvent them, provided that it can show it adds enough local value.

NICK GIBBS

THERE'S ONE BIG DEAL-BREAKER

What could scupper the deal is if Ineos doesn't think it can recoup investment from a REx ahead of the 2035 cut-off date for the sale of CO_2-emitting ICE vehicles.

"If we come out with our Fusilier in 2027 or 2028, we've got a life cycle of selling in Europe and UK of seven years, maximum," CEO Lynn Calder (pictured) told the Financial Times Future of the Car conference in April. "That's not an economic business case."



NIO FIREFLY TEED UP FOR UK DEBUT TO TAKE ON RENAULT 5

THE NIO FIREFLY, a Chinese rival for the Renault 5 and Volkswagen ID 2, has been confirmed for mainland Europe – and UK sales will follow by the year's end.

The electric supermini was launched in China in April with an official range of 260 miles and a single rear-mounted 141bhp motor for the equivalent of around £12,500.

'Firefly' was initially conceived as a stand-alone brand for premium, urban-focused EVs, in the same vein as Mini or Smart, but was repositioned as a sub-brand of Nio – as was the more mainstream-oriented Onvo marque – shortly after launch.

Although the car has been shown with only left-hand drive so far, Nio president Qin Lihong said at the Shanghai motor show the brand will launch a right-hand-drive variant by October.

Previously, it was suggested that Nio was aiming to lay the foundations for a network of battery-swap stations before launching EVs with that tech here. But as the Firefly's range and 100kW maximum charge speed are broadly in line with its rivals, it's possible the company has deemed swapping less critical.

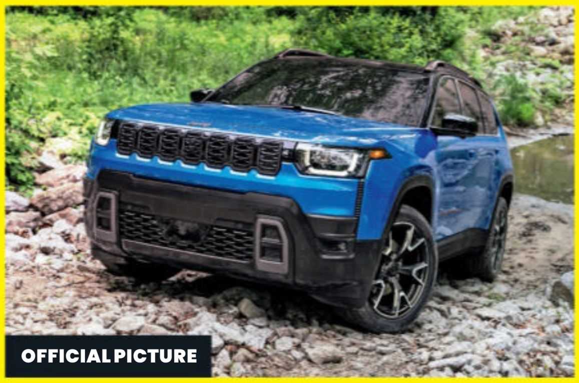
Nio is currently in the process of a dramatic expansion across Europe, pledging to enter 16 new global markets this year alone. Seven of those will be European nations.

The company added that there will be "further news" for Europe in the coming weeks, potentially hinting at a UK arrival. Product planning boss Eric Yu told Automotive News Europe that the UK's lack of import tariffs on Chinese EVs was a key motivator, given that Nio's cars are currently subject to a 31% surcharge in the EU.

Nio's 141bhp Firefly has a 260-mile range and sells for £12,500 in China

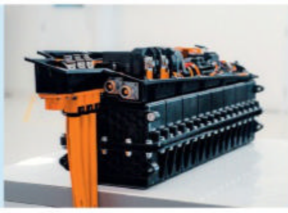
ALL-NEW CHEROKEE SET FOR 2025 ARRIVAL

Jeep has previewed the new Cherokee ahead of its debut later this year. Closely related to the next Alfa Romeo Stelvio, the Land Rover Discovery Sport rival adopts a bold new look modelled on the smaller Compass and swaps onto Stellantis's new STLA Large platform to offer the option of EV power. It is unclear if the car will hit the UK, where it was last on sale in 2019.



RML PACK: SELL, SELL, CELL

UK firm RML can now pitch its new VarEVolt EV battery to other makers after achieving 'conformity of production'. Fitted to the Czinger 21C, it is described as the world's highest-density automotive battery pack.



TINY FIAT EV: EUROPE NEXT?

Fiat's cute three-wheel EV truck could come to the UK. The Tris, a tiny 56-mile urban delivery demon, will be launched in Africa and the Middle East, but boss Olivier François said: "Europe may be next…"

NEW KEYLESS CAR THEFT LAW 'WON'T STOP THE CRIMINALS'

Key hackers can now be jailed – but experts say issues go much deeper

A new law intended to counter the UK's rise in keyless car thefts won't solve the problem, a leading figure in vehicle security has said.

Last year, more than 61,343 vehicles were reported stolen, the third-highest figure in the past decade and double the 2015 total. And around 40% of those were stolen without their keys, by methods including relay attack, which tricks a car into believing the owner's key is present.

In 2023, Autocar reported that one website was selling devices – costing from £2500 to £30,000 – capable of taking control of cars including Range Rovers, Ferraris and Lamborghinis via their on-board 'can bus' system (which enables the micro-controllers and processors to communicate with each other).

Previously, prosecution for handling these and other devices used to steal vehicles was only possible if it could be proved by the police that they had been used to commit a specific crime. Under the new law, anyone who is found in possession of such a device or found to have imported, made, adapted or distributed one could receive a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and an unlimited fine. The owner of the device must prove that they were using it for a legitimate purpose to avoid being prosecuted.

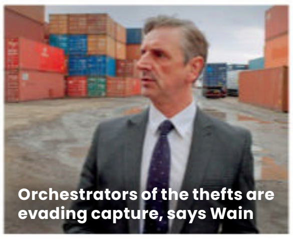
Stolen cars are often taken to 'chop shops' to be broken for parts

Diana Johnson, minister for policing, crime and fire prevention, said: "These new laws will prevent these devices from getting into the hands of thieves and organised crime groups.

"We will also continue to work closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council, which brings together the police and manufacturers to clamp down on vehicle crime."

But Clive Wain, head of police liaison at Tracker, a company that locates stolen cars with the help of the police, doesn't believe the new law will stop the criminals.

"In terms of countering electronic compromise, it's a step in the right direction, but it won't resolve the issue of keyless thefts," he said. "The support we get from the police in tracing stolen cars is magnificent and is why we have a 95% recovery rate. However, I believe there are elements in the judicial system who believe car theft is a victimless crime and that insurers will settle. They may think this way when sentencing.



Orchestrators of the thefts are evading capture, says Wain

"Bringing a car crime offender to justice and knowing full well that at court the sentence won't reflect the time and effort [used on] bringing them to justice is challenging for the police when their resources are stretched."

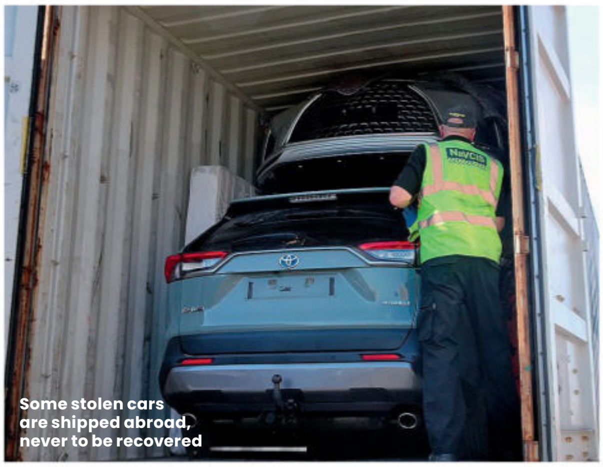
Wain added that while finding the 'chop shops'

CAN'T CATCH 'EM

The police missed an opportunity to catch a car thief in the act recently when, just before he could be arrested, he fled from the Lexus RX that he had stolen on the back of a motorbike ridden by an accomplice.

Their disappointment was compounded by the fact that within just eight minutes of being notified by Tracker that the car, worth £40,000, had been stolen, they had, using Tracker's in-car technology, found it with the engine still running and the thief behind the wheel.

The owner was reunited with their car within an hour but the thief is free to strike again.



Some stolen cars are shipped abroad, never to be recovered

where stolen cars are broken for parts can look like a victory, their discovery is just the tip of an iceberg.

He said: "Chop shops are appearing up and down the country. However, very often the people arrested at the scene are not the orchestrators of the theft or operation. Instead, those people are often overseas. The people in the chop shop are just being paid to steal cars and break them up. So even if they're pursued through the courts, you're missing the top end of the organised crime group.

"Investigating those people uses resources that could be used elsewhere on the thin blue line. It's very difficult."

Neil Thomas, director of investigative services at Inn Track, another vehicle tracking company, believes a lack of co-operation between police forces could also undermine the new law.

"Cross-border investigations are very challenging, and if a car goes to another police area, recovery can be very inconsistent," said the former detective superintendent.

"Recently, we were told that a Mercedes CLA had been stolen without the keys being present from a car park at Stansted airport in Essex. We tracked the car to a street where it had been parked up to 'cool off' while the thieves waited to see if it had been tracked. It had been stolen from the Essex Police area but found in the Metropolitan Police area. The Met told us to liaise with Essex, who said they had to ask the owner if they wanted their car forensically examined. They didn't, and so it was returned to them. The point is that, during this time, valuable opportunities to examine the car were lost and we don't know how it was stolen."

A spokesman for the Met couldn't comment on this case but said it has long-standing arrangements with neighbouring forces, notably Regional Organised Crime Units that work with the National Crime Agency, forces and other partners.

JOHN EVANS

> "Elements in the judicial system believe car theft is a victimless crime"

TRACKER'S UK DETECTIONS IN APRIL 2025

£3,364,519
Value of stolen vehicles, including motorcycles

£90,000
The highest value of a recovered car, a BMW 7 Series

12
Number of arrests

9
Number of 'chop shops' uncovered

0
Number of keys reported stolen

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST MOTORBIKE THEFT

Because they have lower levels of security, motorbikes are a popular target for thieves. Last year, 15,832 were stolen.

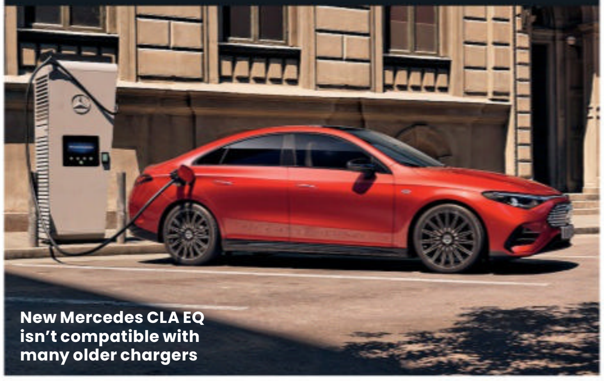
Recently, tracking firm BikeTrac located its biggest-ever haul of stolen bikes when a customer's tracker led it to a shipping container at Tilbury Docks containing their BMW R1200 GS and 24 others.

"When we started 15 years ago, alarms were the only defence and bike recovery rates were just 40%, but today, with tracker technology, they're over 90%," said BikeTrac co-founder Bill Taylor.

"Once they've stolen a bike, like car thieves, bike thieves will park it up to see if it has a tracker and has been located. However, rather than just park it somewhere discreet, we've seen bikes left outside bike dealers with a lock on to try to fool people into believing the bike is legitimate."

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



New Mercedes CLA EQ isn't compatible with many older chargers

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT 800V EV CHARGING TECH?

BUYERS CAN NOW choose between 800V and 400V electric cars, and a greater variety of charging stations has evolved for charging higher-voltage EVs.

EVs with 800V electrical systems can normally use 400V or 800V chargers, the only downside of the former being that it will take longer. But it recently emerged that as far as DC rapid charging is concerned, the new Mercedes-Benz CLA EQ won't be able to use 400V chargers, only 800V ones. It will still be able to charge at home using a domestic AC charger, but is this the start of a trend that could make EV ownership more complicated?

In 800V EVs, a DC-to-DC converter allows charging at lower-voltage stations, and it's this that Mercedes is omitting. But there are already differences in the amounts of power that EVs can accept from DC chargers. For example, charging at the maximum power delivered by a 350kW charger can only be done with an 800V EV but not all EVs with 800V systems can be charged at 350kW.

Charging rates vary among EVs because the fastest rate a battery can accept is the decider, not the electrical architecture.

Why have 800V at all? Well, electrical power is measured in watts, and 1000W equals 1kW. Power in watts is calculated by multiplying volts and amps. So if the voltage is doubled, the amperage halves. In simple terms, amps are like water flowing through plumbing while volts are like the water pressure. So to increase the number of amps flowing through a cable at a given voltage requires a thicker cable, but increase the voltage instead and more power (watts) can be delivered in the same size cable and avoid generating more heat.

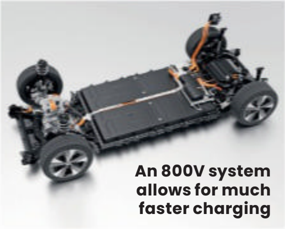
In terms of the vehicle architecture, reducing cable sizes and componentry has a bearing on cooling, packaging and cost. It also affects charger design, the charging cable size and cooling of charging station components.

Ultimately, everything relating to the charging and discharging of an EV's battery is controlled by the battery itself – or, more accurately, the battery management system (BMS).

As with all rechargeable batteries, the rate at which an EV's battery can be charged is defined by its 'C rate'. Charging a battery to its full capacity in an hour makes it a 1C battery; 30 minutes would make it 2C.

The C rate depends on the battery's design and precise chemistry. An EV battery is self-regulating, complex and protected by its BMS, which monitors temperatures and other factors, perhaps allowing faster charging in warm conditions and limiting speeds in cold conditions.

The actual charging power that an EV battery can accept is usually published in the car's manufacturer specification.



An 800V system allows for much faster charging

GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE / THAMES VALLEY POLICE / BIKETRAC

NEW-ERA X5 GETS FLAGSHIP EV, RAD LOOK, DIVERSE FUELS

Battery and hydrogen EVs, diesel, petrol, PHEV for bold next-gen BMW

This is our first look at the radical new electric BMW X5, which has surfaced in range-topping M guise ahead of its launch next year to preview Munich's answer to the Lotus Eletre and upcoming Porsche Cayenne EV.

Electric power is being added for the next-generation X5, which is set to be the third entrant in BMW's Neue Klasse line-up – kicking off this year with the new iX3 (driven, p24) before the closely related new 3 Series in early 2026.

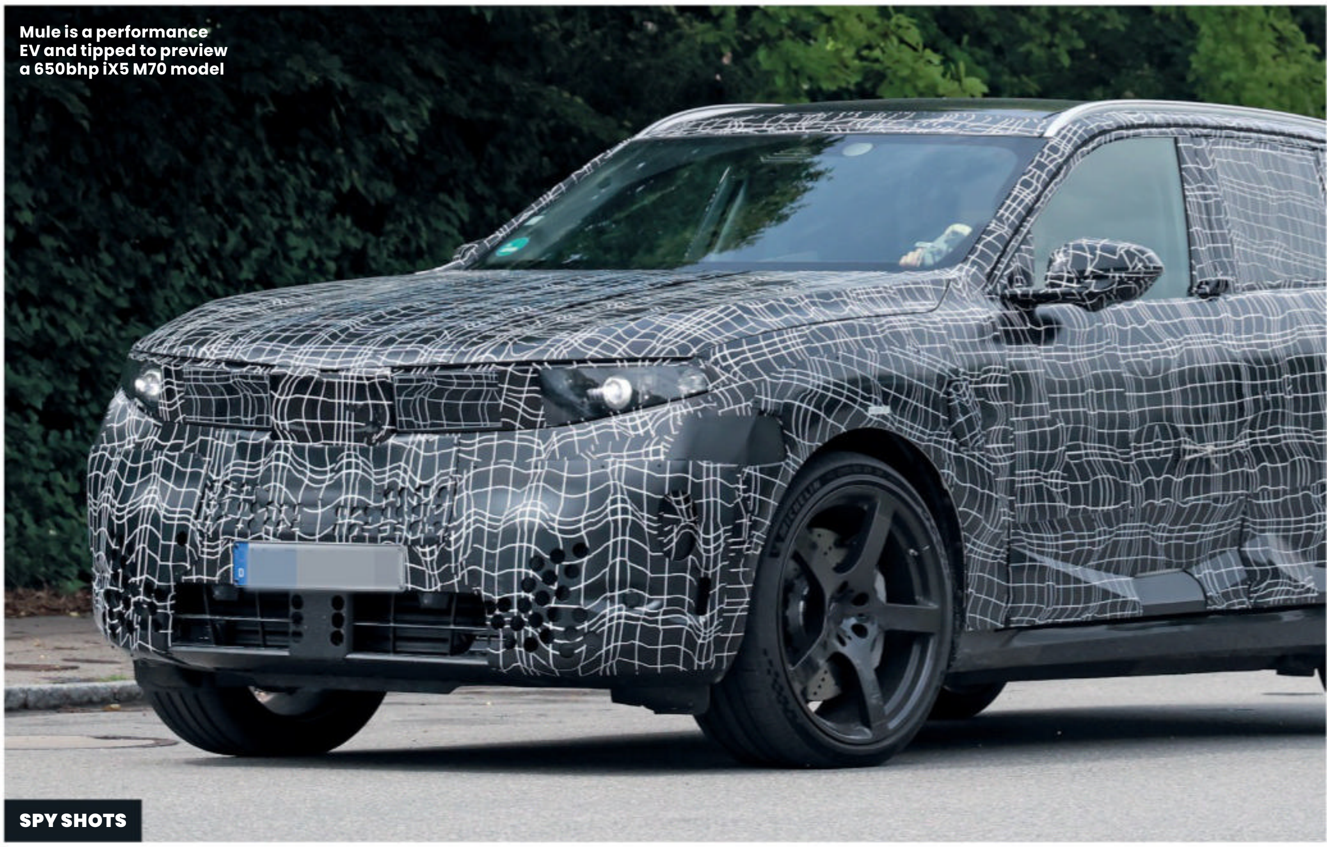
Unlike those two re-platformed cars, though, the fifth-gen X5 will use a redevelopment of the same CLAR (Cluster Architecture) that underpins the current X5, allowing the fitment of petrol, diesel, plug-in hybrid and battery-electric powertrains. A hydrogen model is also planned for 2028, using a fuel cell co-developed with Toyota.

The prototype seen here is electric and is given away as an M-fettled car by its drilled brake discs, sports wheels and performance-oriented, low-profile Michelin tyres, which are rated for speeds of more than 150mph. BMW has yet to launch a full-fat electric M car – the first is expected to be the next-gen M3, due in around 2027 – but the most potent X5 could follow the i7 limo in gaining an M70 range-topper with 650bhp and a 0-62mph time of less than four seconds.

BMW says its upcoming Neue Klasse EVs – including the i3, iX3 and iX5 – will represent a "quantum leap forward" in technology compared with its current EVs. Chief among the upgrades for this next generation is a new type of nickel-manganese-cobalt battery with cylindrical cells, which is said to be 20% denser and easier to package than modules (made up of square cells) found in today's 'Gen5' lithium-iron-phosphate batteries.

The results, claims BMW, are a 30% increase in range, a 20% uptick in efficiency and 30% faster charging. Production costs are also 50% less, BMW has said, suggesting potential for lower prices in the showroom too.

The unveiling of the smaller iX3 at the Munich motor show in September



Mule is a performance EV and tipped to preview a 650bhp iX5 M70 model

SPY SHOTS

SUMMER REVAMP BRINGS SPORTAGE UP TO DATE

THE UPDATED KIA Sportage will arrive in UK showrooms this summer with a bold new look and the choice of petrol or hybrid power.

One of the UK's best-selling cars, the crossover has been reworked to bring its styling into line with its newer stablemates – hence the vertical headlights and a blockier grille up front, plus new lights and a more prominent bumper at the rear.

Two powertrains are available. The range opens with a 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol engine that sends 148bhp to the front wheels through a six-speed manual or seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox.

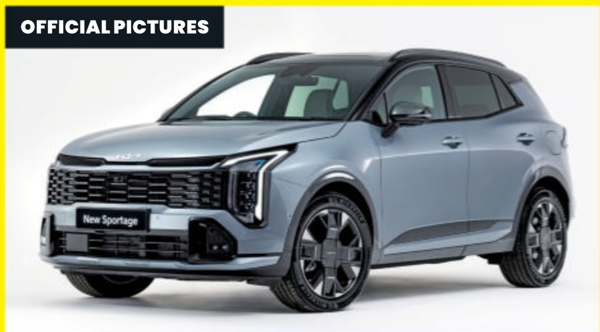
The range-topping hybrid uses the same petrol engine but sandwiches an electric motor between the powerplant and six-speed automatic gearbox, sending 236bhp through either the front or all four wheels.

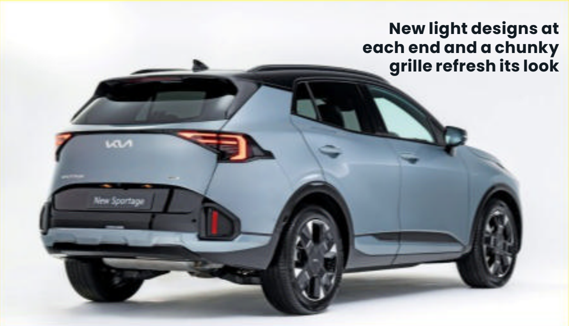
The 261bhp plug-in hybrid is expected to return to the line-up in due course.

Inside the revised Sportage is a new 12.3in curved infotainment touchscreen that runs an updated version of Kia's operating system, along with a new two-spoke steering wheel – but the central touch panel, with buttons for the climate control and other key functions, is retained.

Pricing has yet to be announced but it's expected to broadly align with the current Sportage, which starts at £30,170.

OFFICIAL PICTURES





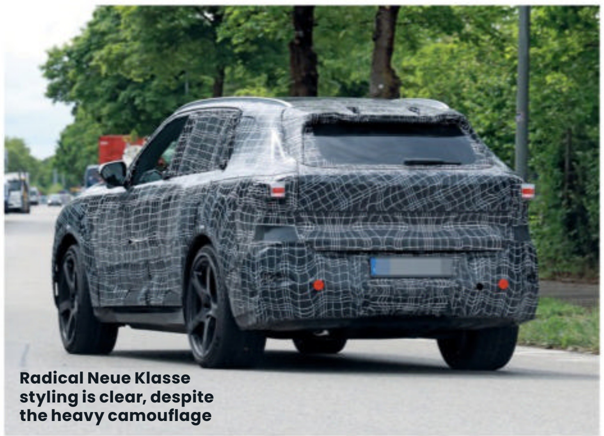
New light designs at each end and a chunky grille refresh its look will give a better idea of the precise battery capacities and power outputs of BMW's next EVs, but the combustion-powered X5 variants will be more closely related to today's car.

The most potent of these is set to be a new electrified M60e range-topper, which will feature a plug-in hybrid set-up based around BMW's turbocharged 3.0-litre straight six. It's possible that it will match the similarly conceived M760e, which packs 563bhp and musters more than 50 miles on electric-only power.

However, the flagship X5 M, due later, will continue to use the 4.4-litre V8, potentially following its M5 saloon sibling in combining the howling eight-pot with an electric motor and a chunky underfloor battery for upwards of 700bhp and an EV range of around 40 miles.

While the new X5 will be evolved technically from the current car, its styling will be totally revamped in line with its Neue Klasse range-mates. Even through this prototype's heavy camouflage, it's clear that the Mk5 will get a bold new front end – most likely with the more traditional upright kidney grilles worn by the X3 concept – together with a wraparound 'grille' panel that houses sensors and cameras for the ADAS suite.

It also appears to have longer front and rear overhangs than the current car, as well as a longer wheelbase, which could make it an indirect replacement for the iX, BMW's current electric SUV flagship, which will be sold until around 2028.
FELIX PAGE



Radical Neue Klasse styling is clear, despite the heavy camouflage

Length of wheelbase suggests iX5 may also act as an iX replacement

VOLVO STRAPS IN FOR NEXT-LEVEL SAFETY

Volvo has invented a new type of seatbelt that could dramatically improve in-car safety – again.

The firm, which was the first to use a three-point seatbelt, in 1959, has revealed a new 'multi-adaptive safety belt'. The belt uses sensors to analyse an occupant's height, weight, body shape and seating position and it responds accordingly in the event of a collision.

A larger occupant will receive a higher belt load, says Volvo, to reduce the risk of head injury, while it will respond less severely for smaller passengers to lessen the impact on their ribs. The system will also react differently according to the nature of the impact, gathering data from around the car "in less than the blink of an eye" to determine how much force the seatbelt should apply.

The new electric EX60, due next year, will be the first car to use the new belts and Volvo says over-the-air updates will mean "it gets better over time".

"This belt offers the benefits of a full harness combined with those of a lap strap…" See what else we said about Volvo's radical 'three-point' safety belt design at the 1959 London motor show.

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Kia executive vice-president Ted Lee: "UK is the best place to learn"

THE STARTING POINT for the success of Kia in the UK can be traced back to a hotel room in West Horsley, Surrey, in late 2006. With the beds in the room removed and trestle tables installed in their place, Toyota's Paul Philpott was interviewed by seven Kia executives about becoming managing director of Kia in the UK. Two weeks later, he got the job.

Philpott recounted his recruitment process to me shortly after Kia had smashed through the 100,000 sales barrier in the UK for the first time, in 2022.

Still under Philpott, Kia will soon be on track for 120,000 UK sales and is the number-three brand in the UK in 2025, behind only VW and BMW.

That hotel room came up again in a recent chat with Ted Lee, now Kia's executive vice-president and de facto deputy to CEO Ho Song Sung.

Lee was one of the seven executives on the other side of the trestle table to Philpott and Korean employee number one in the UK after Kia took control of its UK operation in 2002 from a distributor.

"We had to build a new workforce and make a new organisation to grow in the UK," says Lee. "We needed some capable people to manage Kia in the UK and I went out to recruit them."

In 2007, Lee left Kia UK in Philpott's hands to go elsewhere in the Kia global organisation. His current role is vast, managing the international markets' volumes and inventories as Kia moves its cars from its nine global factories to dealers, always with a focus on making sure there is demand for that model in that market at that time to ensure they're "pulled" to the market rather than "pushed", to preserve residual values.

"We listen to requirements and requests and look at sales trends. Then we apply that to the situation," he says. "The main job is communication and listening."

Lee says there is an "art" to managing inventory and supply and you can make a "mess" if you're not on top of it. You need to time car supply right to capitalise on sales trends and to take advantage of any market incentives. Kia's success with the scrappage scheme in 2009, and with European EV incentives in recent years, is proof of that.

Lee's office at Kia HQ in Seoul gives insight into both his role and his effervescent character: a huge whiteboard diaries his month ahead, while a series of clocks show the different time zones of the markets he manages.

On the wall is a shirt from the Kia Tigers baseball team, champions last year in Korea but a few places back this year. Lee says: "Soon is Kia Tigers Day, when more than 2000 people here from the company will go to the stadium." They'll cheer loudly and enjoy a beer.

Lee says it was his five-year stint in the UK that he has enjoyed the most so far in his career. "It was my first overseas role and I had the chance to learn the car business in an advanced market," he says. "The UK is the best place to learn."

"We had to build a new workforce and make a new organisation in the UK"

TYRE WEAR IN THE SPOTLIGHT AS EV RUBBER GAINS TRACTION

Tyre makers focus on EVs' needs amid rising demand for replacements

CUPRA
KY24 XFF

A year since it began marketing EV-specific tyres for electric vans and taxis, British company Enso has launched its first tyres for passenger EVs – specifically, the Tesla Model 3 and Y and Jaguar I-Pace.

There are currently more than 1.5 million electric cars on UK roads, and this year car makers expect to sell a further 450,000. Meanwhile, in 2022, 40 million car tyres were sold in the UK in a market worth around £2.3 billion. By 2030, the market is expected to be worth around £3.9bn.

Compared with giants such as Michelin and Continental, Enso is a relative minnow, but it punches above its weight thanks to initiatives such as direct sales and an emphasis on technical innovation - including reducing particulate pollution through improved tyre wear rates.

"The sheer weight of EVs impacts the tyres," said Gunnlaugur Erlendsson, founder and CEO of Enso. "The fact that you then have high torque and the cars being driven in urban areas also has an impact. The tyres wear down, but we reduce the rate at which they do by using better raw materials, construction and 'recipes', and by collecting data continuously from the field to understand how EVs are reacting to the road."

Balancing tyre wear with optimal rolling efficiency, the desired wet and dry handling performance and acceptable noise levels are among the challenges confronting Enso and other manufacturers of EV tyres.

Enso has previously made tyres for EV vans and taxis

Falken's Leendertse: focus is on tyres lasting longer

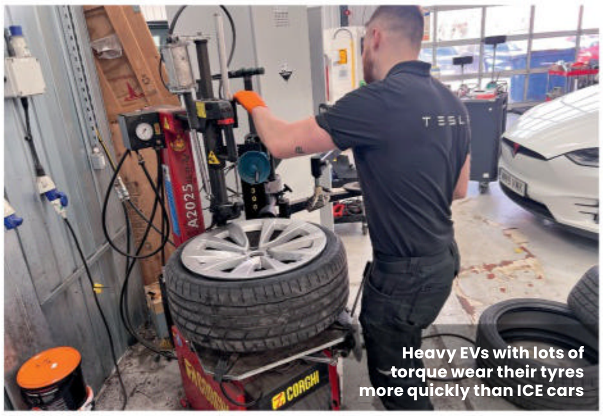
"Today, tyres are coping with far heavier vehicle loads than in the past," said Jaap Leendertse, general manager of tyre development at Falken Tyres. "Previously, you had 50% of a tyre's load capacity utilised; now we are at 70-80%, and that means we are more focused on the tyre lasting longer."

Michelin has stated that EVs wear tyres 20% faster than ICE vehicles. According to Kwik Fit, Tesla models are the heaviest on tyres, while Citroën, Mercedes and BMW models are among those needing fresh tyres at an above-average rate.

Enso's new EV-specific tyres are marketed as such (although they can be used with other fuel types), but many new tyres coming to market today are touted by their makers as suitable for EVs, hybrids and even ICE vehicles. Chris Staincliffe, senior marketing manager at Micheldever, a leading tyre wholesaler, said: "The reason is that the EV tyre market is still small, so they would rather design a tyre for all applications. They are still required to have an EV tyre's strengthened sidewall, lower rolling resistance, low road noise levels and good wear rates, but being made in volume means they can have all these things and still be affordable.

"In any case, all tyres – regardless of the car they are fitted to – need to satisfy these goals in order to achieve good ratings. It's also easier for consumers when one tyre fits all. We've seen EVs arrive at our fitting centres on incompatible ICE tyres that are completely shredded. The trend for dual-purpose tyres is catching on, with more now appearing at mid-price. Customers are becoming savvy about dual-purpose tyres and asking for them."

JOHN EVANS



Heavy EVs with lots of torque wear their tyres more quickly than ICE cars

ARE EV-READY TYRES MORE EXPENSIVE?

Autocar compared prices of premium EV-ready tyres for three electric cars with tyres for their ICE equivalents.

Compared with a Volkswagen Golf 1.5 TSI, the tyres for a VW ID 3 were on average 55% more expensive – probably because its 18in wheels are 2in larger. Those for a BMW iX3 M Sport are different sizes front and rear than for a BMW X3, whose tyres are all the same size. The iX3's tyres were 10% more expensive at the front and 13% more expensive at the rear. The tyres for a Mini Cooper and Cooper Electric cost the same.

"As the number of EV-ready tyres grows, prices should fall, but there are few signs of it at the moment," says Micheldever's Chris Staincliffe. "However, they are still much cheaper than OE, EV-only tyres."

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Could this Pop Yellow EV be the ideal replacement for the Cropley family Mini?

MONDAY

A bright day has dawned. My new Renault 5 long-termer has arrived – with the loudest paint (Pop Yellow) you're ever likely to see. James Attwood, who went to the Bristol docks to collect the car a few weeks ago, handed it over with remarkably little complaint, and I'm now looking forward to a few months' compact electric motoring.

Early impressions: up close it's big if you have previous 5s in mind, but that's because it's taller rather than longer: there's a battery under your feet. But it zips through traffic and feels agile. I'm as impressed with the composed, quiet ride as I was when driving an early left-hander last Christmas. The one thing I could do without is the tendency for the overzealous brakes to grab at low speed, but perhaps that will abate.

The Steering Committee, whose 69-plate Mini Cooper S is getting slightly leggy, has shown active interest in a 5, but I've learned never to make predictions. We will have a verdict soon.

TUESDAY

For the past couple of years, ever since Matt Prior ran one as a long-termer, the Polestar 2 Performance has been one of my favourite cars. I scheme and connive to drive one whenever I can – and I was on a discreet Cotswolds blast in the latest edition when I heard a journalist talking about a growing, worrying condition among modern consumers called 'news aversion', whereby people presume they're going to hear modern bad stuff and tune out.

Just remember this: in Italy, they drive on the wrong side of the road

> **"I resolved to accept all electronic interventions"**

I found myself relating this to my behaviour with cars: despite the general improvement of roads, cars, signage, safety, charging and all the rest, I allow myself to get too upset by modern intrusions into how I drive. For the rest of my journey (140 miles), I resolved to do everything correctly: obey every limit, avoid distractions and accept (but drive to minimise) all electronic interventions. I tried to be as understanding as possible of pedestrians, cyclists and other drivers. It took lots of brain-strain, so I'm not sure I could be as exacting forever, and some road users were annoyed with my by-the-book behaviour. But I enjoyed the challenge and don't believe it hurt my journey time at all.

WEDNESDAY

Years ago, I got close to having a go at that traditional into-Europe expedition for Minis, The Italian Job, devised in memory of the 1969 Michael Caine film. The engine of the early Mini I was to drive exploded expensively and the idea faded away. However, the event hasn't just survived but thrived, raising £3.1 million for kids' charities since 1990 and providing brick-shaped adventures for thousands. Its indefatigable organiser, Frederick St George, says now is the right time to enter this year's 11-day event, which costs £1900 per person and will start in Imola on 7 October. Much more at italianjob.com.

THURSDAY

I'm of admiration for a friend, Mark Bradbury, who is a member of the curatorial team at the British Motor Museum, for launching his third car book, this time covering the life and times of Britain's most popular car, the Ford Fiesta.

Bradbury was a software engineer at Rolls-Royce for 37 years and does this as a hobby. "I got into writing by accident," he says. "An author friend was offered a chance to write a Renault 4 book but didn't have time, so I did it. Nowadays I get a peculiar buzz out of having books on my shelves with my name on the spine."

You can find his book 'Ford Fiesta' at amberley-books.com for £15.99.

AND ANOTHER THING

For the SMMT's annual media test day at Millbrook a few weeks ago, Mercedes UK brought this distinguished old 450 SEL 6.9 limo along with its new models because, that very day, the S-Class was celebrating its half century. The car didn't drive or look its age, but then that has always been a Merc strength.

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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

Have you seen the Twisted TBug? Twisted, the friendly, Yorkshire-based modifier of classic Land Rover Defenders (and now owner of a marine division as well), has started offering a Volkswagen Beetle Baja Bug restomod too. (If it starts doing Hillman Imps, our respective garages will look even more alike.)

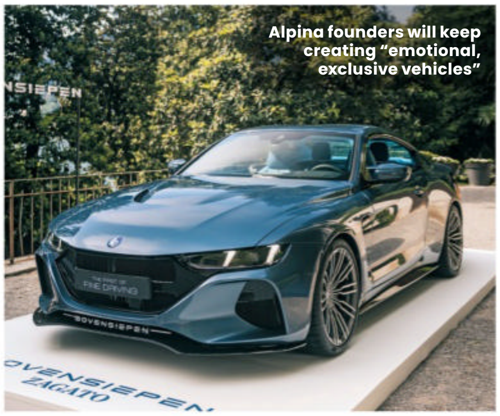
Unsurprisingly, the TBug looks somewhat nicer than my Baja Bug, because Twisted are people who are used to doing things properly. The interior looks trimmed beautifully, the stance is just so (I'm tempted to have a word with the front end of mine and a grinder) and there's a reinforced chassis, a new engine, new electrics and LED lights that don't look daft.

The power output has been about doubled over the original, but it's still making less than 80bhp, so it isn't a fast car – but that doesn't matter a bit.

"What makes the TBug special is that it makes you smile every time you slide behind the wheel," says Twisted founder Charles Fawcett. "In a world of increasingly serious and complex vehicles, there's something wonderfully refreshing about that." As they might have said in the 1970s, I can dig that.

Unlike Twisted Defenders and Suzuki Jimnys, this car exists in the 'special projects' bit of the company's offerings. Lots of personalisation and customisation is on offer and it's the sort of thing you could get lost for days in with the designers – although Twisted has made three for sale already to its thinking, in grey, green and yellow. You can spend around £95,000.

Rather refreshingly, the TBug is a restomod that isn't about adding silly power, keying a chassis down to the road or fitting an electric drivetrain to it. And better still, it's one that's based on a rear-engined, air-cooled, two-door German car but not a you-know-what.



Alpina founders will keep creating "emotional, exclusive vehicles"

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

Further to my lament last week that the closing of Ford's Focus ST order book spelled the end of the affordable fast Ford for the first time in my life, now comes the news (p8) that Honda is ending sales of the Civic Type R in Europe.

A bit like the hot Focus, the hot Civic went from affordable to a few notches above that some time ago. A cheap fast hatch hasn't always been a staple in Honda's range, but still, it feels a shame.

There are lots of fast cars available today, because electric motors turn very quickly, but there are fewer fun cars. Plenty of manufacturers know how to fit powerful motors, but there seem to be fewer that know how to make that exciting and engaging. I think good things await for those who nail it best.

> **"There are lots of fast cars today but fewer fun cars"**

BUCHLOE ENDURES

The Bovensiepen family, who owned Alpina, the maker of BMW-based exclusive cars, opted to sell the brand to BMW when it came asking, partly because they were operating at a scale at which the risks outweighed the returns.

You could buy a lot of Alpina variants, but the company was spread thin. Should it work on petrols, diesels, PHEVs or EVs? They didn't know for sure which customers would want how many of each, and the penalties for wrong-guessing that (or making legislative errors) were grave for a company of Alpina's size. For instance, BMW was once fined millions not for fitting dodgy 'defeat device' software but for inadvertently installing the wrong engine software.

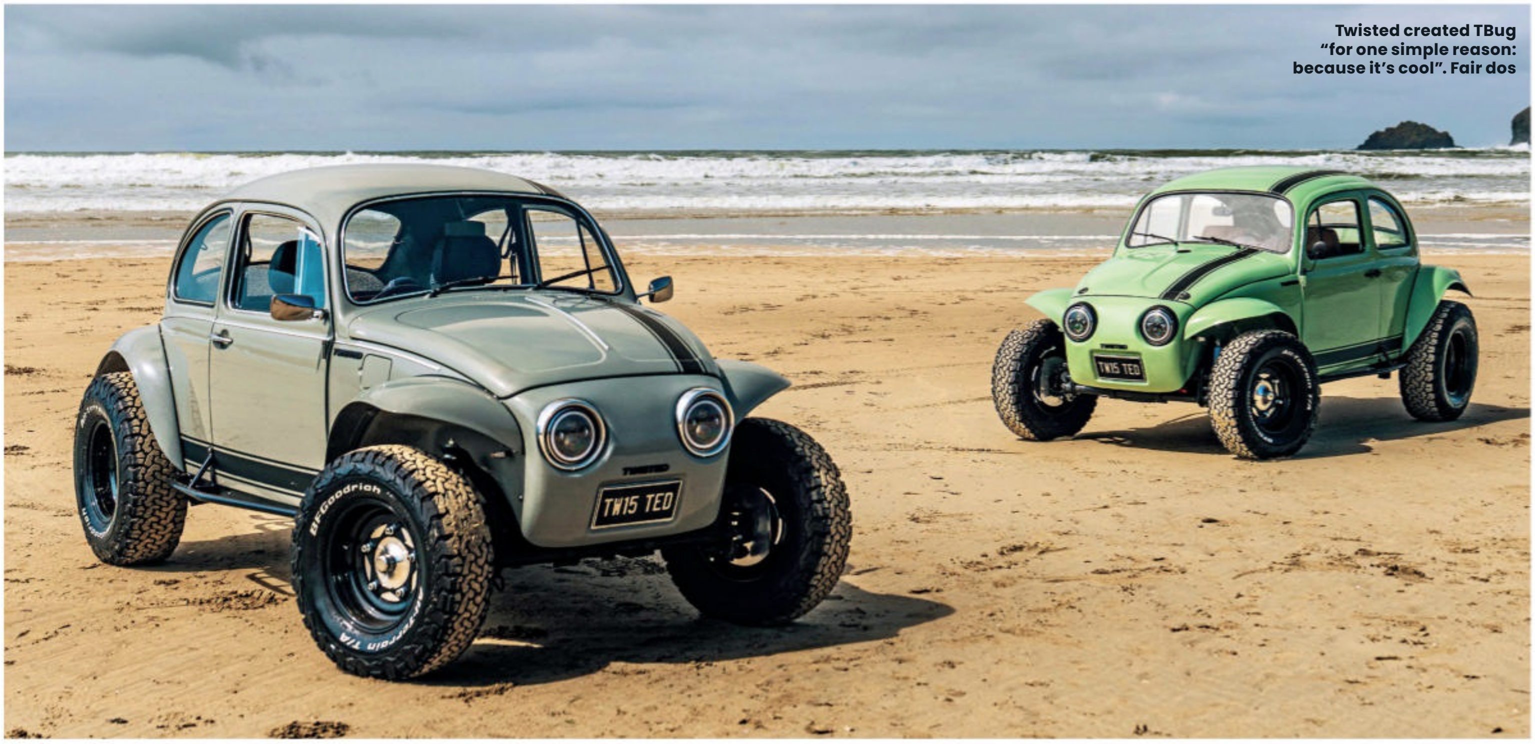
As part of the deal, the Bovensiepens retained the rights to Alpina Classic, were permitted to restore and repair older Alpinas and could even turn older BMWs into Alpinas (less so software-heavy later ones). But a new car, the Bovensiepen Zagato, an M4-based GT that was launched last week, was in their thinking even then.

"We don't want to stop right now," Andreas Bovensiepen told us in 2022. "If we're thinking of a new car, we need to use another name, and we will probably use our family name. But which kind of products we do in the future, there's no decision, because it's still too early."

Now we do know: Bovensiepen will be a smaller set-up, more exclusive and more coachbuildery, and that seems entirely sensible. More modest returns but lower risks and a lot of creative freedom.

I'd felt sad that Alpina had to an extent finished (caveat: BMW might do amazing things with it). Now good news: it hasn't really gone anywhere.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com



Twisted created TBug "for one simple reason: because it's cool". Fair dos

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RACING LINES

Damien Smith

There will have been some awkward conversations at Red Bull this past week

Three grands prix in as many weeks, three different winners. Who can still claim Formula 1 is too predictable?

At Imola, a perfectly executed pass on a cautious Oscar Piastri at the start was the key to a classic Max Verstappen victory; Lando Norris bounced back from a disappointing recent run to win convincingly in Monaco – always a career landmark; and then Piastri rediscovered his composure to take the top step in Spain.

The McLaren duo arrive in Montreal this weekend separated by just 10 points. But the spotlight might well be trained on Verstappen following a Barcelona race where we yet again witnessed the light and shade in which this sublime four-time world champion exists.

Red Bull's aggressive three-stop strategy made Verstappen a threat beyond anyone else against the clearly superior McLarens. But in the wake of a safety car restart, did he really drive into George Russell's Mercedes on purpose? It sure looked that way. Turn five at the Circuit de Catalunya is a slow one, so let's not get too carried away on the danger aspect, but ramming a rival at any speed is the worst crime a racing driver can commit. If it was intentional, which it surely was, what a shame that Verstappen should stoop so low, then stand in petulant defiance.

A HEAVY COST

So late in the race, the punishment was 10 seconds added to Verstappen's overall time, which demoted him from fourth to 10th. Many, including 2016 world champion Nico Rosberg, believed he should have been disqualified.

Whatever, the punishment as it stands does carry heavy consequences. Verstappen is now 49 points behind Piastri, and even if he says he's not really in a title fight against the generally faster McLarens, his own temper might well have holed his long-shot bid for a fifth consecutive crown.

> **"This champion is always consistent in setting a low tone"**

If he can still achieve it from here (and because it's Verstappen and Red Bull, we can't rule it out), it would probably be among the greatest feats in the 75 years of the drivers' world championship.

There's another consequence. As we do on the road, F1 drivers earn points on their licences for misdemeanours. Verstappen's tally is now up to 11 – and if that becomes 12 or more, he will earn a one-race ban. Some of those points will drop away at the end of this month, because enough time will have elapsed for them to be erased from his record. But for now he will be living on the edge, starting in Canada. And if he steps over it, he will risk a red card for Red Bull's home race in Austria, where his deeply partisan 'orange army' of fans turn out in their thousands. It would be unfortunate, to put it lightly, were he to miss the occasion through his own actions.

THE TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT

In the wake of the Barcelona incident, Russell – with whom Verstappen has plenty of history – was scathing in his criticism, claiming that such actions should be beneath such a great driver. He also pointed out, not for the first time, that such behaviour sets a bad example for young racers on the way up. Verstappen apologists dismiss this angle as trite, while the man himself responded childishly with a comment about "bringing tissues next time". Always consistent in setting a low tone, that's this champion. But Russell has a point: what drivers do at the top of the sport does trickle down to the junior slopes. We've seen it in earlier eras, when both Ayrton Senna and Michael Schumacher lowered the bar on what could be justified on track.

Win at all costs: it's an ugly trait of modern sport, and Verstappen seems to live by it without a hint of regret. He's just never wrong, is he?

Russell got the better of Verstappen, as did the Dutchman's temper

FLAWED GUIDELINES

Where I do have some sympathy with Verstappen is on the 'racing guidelines' F1 drivers currently live by. Devised by the drivers themselves to ensure stewards can rule with consistency, the guidelines have boxed them into a corner – literally. Racing to the apex first never used to be enough for a driver to assume a position was won, but that's now what defines a successful move, no matter where his rival consequently finds himself. It's a flawed and simplistic rule that's the root cause of so many disputes.

This time, Red Bull thought Russell had won the corner he was racing Verstappen for. His rival didn't think so, and actually neither did the FIA, but in the moment Red Bull told him to give the place up. It was the attempt to stick to the guidelines that Verstappen has used to his own benefit so many times that helped fire his anger. It didn't justify his actions. Nothing could. But the misguided guidelines were certainly the trigger.

RED BULL CONTENT POOL / GETTY IMAGES

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

LAMENT FOR FORD

It's so sad to see such a large part of motoring history struggling to survive its death throes ('Ford Focus ST goes off sale', autocar.co.uk). My father had a Ford 10cwt van for work in 1947, then in the 1950s and 1960s a string of Popular, Anglia and later 105Es. I remember the launch of the Cortina and I later went on to buy a Capri (the real one!), Cortinas, a Fiesta, a Granada and a Sierra. Then I found BMW.

It is hard to understand why such a successful manufacturer can have drifted off target and lost its way. The Focus has always been a very good car and the Fiesta had brought driving to thousands just after passing their test. The new Puma is good and we have one for local runs, but the Mustang Mach-E and Capri fiasco has made life so difficult, and the other models are lacklustre offerings.

Grab an ST as they were and keep it, but the future is dark… Ford has lost its way and I don't see any way for it to come back. How did it go so wrong?

'FTM594', via autocar.co.uk

NO ONE WANTS THEM

Autocar's online news story about the demise of the Ford Focus ST read like a news release attempting to shift the 170 unsold examples currently littering Ford's UK dealer network.

And the reason why production is being discontinued is because buyers no longer want this type of car at the price that Ford is asking. How times have changed.

But the problem is that buyers don't seem to want the company's EV products either.

Not so long ago, Ford dominated the UK sales charts with its top-selling Fiesta, Focus and Mondeo models. Where did it all go wrong?

LP
Via autocar.co.uk

I WON'T MISS YOU

Ford is running out of road here, both in the UK and Europe. It won't be long before it does what General Motors did when it sold Opel-Vauxhall and went.

Where did it all go wrong? The failure to replace the Fiesta, Ka+ and Mondeo and the changes to the fleet market, with the introduction of user choosers: who would want a Ford when models from Audi, BMW etc are available instead?

Ford's EV line-up hasn't been that much to celebrate either, with the Mustang Mach-E being priced at £50k, the Capri and Explorer at £40k and the Puma Gen-E at £30k, all of which seem overpriced compared with what else is on the market.

Will I be sorry to see Ford leave Europe? Not really. It has been the architect of its own misfortune, and no doubt the new entrants to the market will easily fill the void left by its departure.

Ian P
Via autocar.co.uk

THAT'S NUMBERWANG

What is it with modern car manufacturers? For decades, we have been used to the number suffix on car models. From Austin 7 and Standard 10 to Porsche 356 and Rover 75 to numerous BMW and Polestar models, along with others, we have got used to just saying the number part of the model name. But now some are insisting on a pointless prefix, to supposedly make us say Smart 'number one' (which I pronounce as just 'one') and DS 'number four'. I had no problem with the alphanumerical naming of Citroëns over the years.

The only country I know of that puts a prefix before a number, the US, uses it in the manner of 'the #1 sports team in the world', in which it is actually pronounced as 'number'.

Think of the gallons of ink and thousands of electrons to be saved through abandoning this idea.

Mike Millard
Via email

In the case of the Smart #1, you're actually meant to say 'hashtag one', which surely is even sillier! – KC

A BRAND DOWN UNDER

Kris Culmer mentioned in his review of the GWM Haval Jolion Pro (4 May) that GWM outsells Volkswagen in Australia.

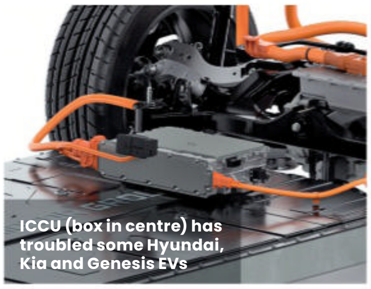
GWM sells a much larger range of cars here than in the UK: we get the larger Haval H6, the Tank SUVs and the Cannon utes as well. A very off-road-capable Tank 300 is around the same price as a base-model Volkswagen T-Roc. The Jolion is by far the worst model in the range.

Might I add as well that here in Oz, if you want a passenger car like a mid-size SUV, Ford no longer sells them: it's just the Ranger, the Everest [a Ranger-based 4x4], the Transit and the Mustang. And while Holden did once sell great cars like the Commodore, it also sold complete s***heaps like the Captiva, which were cheap to buy but very unreliable. So many people bought them, got burned by them and said never again; that's why Holden no longer exists. The buyers who lapped those up for nothing but their low prices are now buying Chinese cars for the same reason.

Jake Williams
Via Facebook

GWM Cannon: the Holden Utility of the modern age

Coining names might not be China's forte



ICCU (box in centre) has troubled some Hyundai, Kia and Genesis EVs

FEAR OF THE VOID

I am somewhat concerned when reading of drivers switching off the 'safety aids' in their cars, as surely this amounts to a change of specification, of which the insurer must be informed?

James Switzer
Via email

The Association of British Insurers said: "While it is best practice to keep these systems switched on to promote safe driving habits, you should still be covered by your motor insurer if you decide to switch it off and are later involved in an accident. Policies can vary, so be sure to read your documents carefully to understand any terms, conditions and exclusions."

VW POLIO, ANYONE?

I think our friends at Chery need to fire their marketing team. "What do you drive?" "Oh, a Lepas..." Seriously, nobody wants to drive an unfortunate disease car. What next? An Ebolas? Or maybe a Covida?

Anthony Bunnage
Via email

FAULTY AS CHARGED

I recently talked my mother out of her ageing but thoroughly reliable Mk6 Volkswagen Golf and into a new Kia EV3. Despite her trepidation, having never had an EV before, she quickly grew to love it, and has ventured as far as Scotland from her home on the south coast – with relative ease.

Just over a month ago, she texted me to say that when she had plugged the car in, it tripped the charger – odd but of little consequence, until the next morning when the car was found to be completely dead. Kaput.

It was duly recovered to Kia, who have yet to officially diagnose the issue, but they are working with a failed integrated charging unit (ICCU). This was also a problem with the Kia EV6 when it was launched.

Shockingly, there won't be any replacement parts available until July at the earliest, so her brand-new car will be out of action for at least a few months. Kia has kindly provided her with a replacement e-Niro, but this seems a shocking state of affairs to me, especially for a firm that prides itself on reliability.

Tim Kingswell
Via email

There have been no recalls for the EV3 in the UK, but the EV6 was recalled in May 2024 for an ICCU fix. According to US authorities, the Hyundai Group's ICCU issue is caused by over-voltage induced at the start or end of 12V battery charging and from thermal loading in charging or driving – KC

STAYING WITH THREE

It's good news that the updated Toyota Aygo X can do 74mpg but bad news that the introduction of the hybrid system from the Yaris means a manual gearbox is no longer available (News, 4 June). Swings and roundabouts, I guess.

More importantly, you said that the engine has four cylinders, but actually the Yaris Hybrid has only ever had three.

Dean Yates
Via email

You're quite right. Apologies – CM

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GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 18 JUNE

COMPARISON

V12 SUPER-GT SHOWDOWN

Aston Martin's new Vanquish takes on the mighty Ferrari 12Cilindri

INSIGHT

INSIDE GENERAL MOTORS' UK DESIGN STUDIO

Why does the American giant have a studio here? Ex-Jaguar design chief Julian Thomson invites us in to explain all

ROAD TEST

CUPRA TERRAMAR

Is this new crossover more than just an angry Volkswagen Tiguan?

EVERY WEEK

MY CAR & I

AUSTIN-HEALEY SPRITE

The man who's owned it for 57 years recounts some adventures in it that will raise your eyebrows

USED GUIDE

VOLVO XC60

This Swedish SUV is a brilliant, versatile family car – and now a bargain to boot

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FIRST DRIVES

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

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BMW iX3

All-new platform, drivetrain, battery and digital interface: the brand's electric reboot starts here

BMW's Neue Klasse isn't just a new platform – it draws a line in the sand for how the brand designs, builds and powers its electric cars.

I've come to BMW's Miramas proving ground in the south of France to drive prototypes of the first Neue Klasse model: the all-new iX3 SUV. So today marks our first chance to discover whether this rival for the Audi Q6 E-tron and upcoming electric Mercedes-Benz GLC (see p6) delivers on the promise that BMW has been building over the past two years.

Said promise has unfolded through a series of concept cars. First came the i Vision Dee, a compact saloon exploring new ideas about digital interaction. Then the Vision Neue Klasse saloon heralded a dramatic new design direction. Next the Vision Neue Klasse X clearly previewed the new iX3 and its Panoramic iDrive system. And most recently the Vision Driving Experience, a quad-motor saloon, lifted the lid on the performance technology of future M cars. Now, after all that build-up, here comes the reality.

The significance of the Neue Klasse platform shouldn't be underestimated. Since the 2013 launch of BMW's first series-production EV, the i3, each new one has been based on a shared platform originally engineered to support combustion engines. That includes the original iX3, launched in 2020 on BMW's CLAR platform – flexible, yes, but not conceived for full electrification.

The Neue Klasse changes that. It's a clean-sheet design, and BMW has invested more than £1.7 billion in its development. More than half of that has gone into an all-new production plant in Debrecen, Hungary, where the new iX3 will enter series production later this year.

It will be the basis for at least six new EVs by 2028, including the ▸

TESTER'S NOTE
Getting in requires a touch more effort than with some electric SUVs, due to a noticeably wide sill. This is a result of longitudinal reinforcement structures integrated beneath the doors, these aluminium elements giving the battery additional crash protection. **GK**

"It has an assured, unflustered nature that feels distinctly BMW"

◂ eagerly awaited electric 3 Series – set to take the i3 name next year. But it all begins with the iX3.

Get inside and it's clear that this is more than just a platform shift – it's a design and user experience reinvention too. At the centre of it all is BMW's new Panoramic iDrive system, which ditches the traditional instrument cluster in favour of a slim, dot-matrix-style display housed within the base of the windscreen. This is complemented by a rhomboid central touchscreen and an optional 3D head-up display – all running BMW's new OS X software with the latest over-the-air software update capability and enhanced voice interaction via a revised Intelligent Personal Assistant.

First previewed on the Vision Neue Klasse X, this cabin concept includes a lower, cleaner dashboard and a completely new generation of steering wheel.

The pillar-to-pillar display is sharp and legible, although oddly you can't view the power and torque data and trip readouts simultaneously – an odd oversight for a brand that still holds firm to its traditional 'ultimate driving machine' mantra.

Most surfaces remain covered in these early prototypes, so a full assessment of material quality will have to wait – but from what I can see, BMW has taken a step forward.

Interior space is on par with the current ICE X3, with which the new iX3 shares vital components, but with a flatter floor, thanks to the adoption of the new platform.

Rear visibility is compromised somewhat by the shallow rear window and sloping roofline.

Boot space remains unconfirmed, but expect a similar 570 litres to that of the petrol X3, increasing to about 1700 litres with the rear seats folded.

New iX3 is notably better to drive than its predecessor

There's no start button. If the key is nearby, the iX3 is effectively on and ready: just knock the gear selector into drive and off you go.

Underpinning the new iX3 is BMW's Gen6 electric drivetrain. It runs on a new 800V electrical architecture, replacing the 400V system of earlier BMW EV models, bringing a major leap in charging capability and performance.

It also adopts a new battery made via a 'cell-to-pack' process, in which cylindrical battery cells are placed directly into the battery housing without first being assembled into modules. Compared with the prismatic cells used by BMW's Gen5 drivetrain, the new battery has 20% greater energy density. BMW has yet to confirm the battery's capacity, but it claims a WLTP range of up to 497 miles for the iX3 – some 210 miles or 30% more than before.

The peak DC charging rate has more than doubled from the 150kW of the previous iX3. It's now 400kW, allowing a 218-mile top-up in just 10 minutes under ideal conditions.

Bi-directional charging is also supported now, meaning the new iX3 can send power to your home or external devices.

Two powertrains will be available: a single-motor, rear-wheel-drive one and a dual-motor, four-wheel-drive version. The latter pairs an asynchronous motor at the

Despite the camo, the styling is clearly similar to that of the Vision Neue Klasse X

front with a synchronous motor at the rear, delivering up to 402bhp and 443lb ft. Expect 0-62mph in less than 5.0sec and a higher top speed than the previous iX3's 112mph.

I'm driving early durability prototypes here, some bearing the scars of serious development mileage, yet the steps forward in performance, handling and refinement from the old iX3 are already unmistakable.

There are four driving modes: Personal, Sport, Efficient and Silent. The first of those is configurable, allowing adjustment of drivetrain, steering and regeneration settings.

All systems are managed by a new central control unit, dubbed the Heart of Joy, which processes data 10 times faster than BMW's current system. There's a heightened level of response and faster reactions at one end of the driving spectrum, calmer and more composed properties at the other.

Energy recuperation remains a key focus. As such, BMW says that up to 98% of braking can be handled by the electric motors alone and the physical brakes are only required during hard stops.

As in other existing BMW EVs, there are no steering wheel paddles to alter the level of regen. Instead, you switch between drive and battery mode via the gear selector. D allows for mild coasting while B delivers robust deceleration and true one-pedal driving.

The new iX3 borrows elements of its double-wishbone front and multi-link rear suspension from the current ICE X3. That means it sticks with steel springs, whereas some rivals have more elaborate air suspension systems. New for this model, though, is a hydraulic rebound stop, designed to iron out harshness and give the ride a more polished and compliant feel.

And polished it is. There's a likeable cohesion to the way the iX3 moves – an assured, unflustered nature that feels distinctly BMW but also evolved for a greater breadth of ability than its Chinese-produced predecessor. Step-off is very smooth and measured. Throttle application is progressive and well metered – linear rather than lurching.

The steering is light yet precise at lower speeds, making tight urban manoeuvres a breeze. Push harder and the variable-ratio system firms it up nicely, providing a feeling of connection that gives the iX3 a level of involvement beyond its rivals'.

On the flowing bitumen in and around the Miramas facility, it proved eager and predictable, with plenty of front-end bite and outstanding straight-line stability. Weight distribution, always a key consideration for BMW, is 49:51 front to rear.

Despite being larger than its predecessor and most likely tipping the scales at close to 2300kg, the iX3 never feels overly cumbersome. Body control is one of its standout traits. There are moderate levels of lean, but it's progressive and well contained, communicated clearly enough through the chassis to keep you clued into what's happening.

That transparency breeds confidence. And when I switched off the stability control on the skid pan, there was enough adjustability to trim my line with a cheeky dab of the brakes mid-corner.

Ride quality, too, has improved noticeably. The old CLAR-based iX3 often felt a little brittle, especially over broken surfaces; on the 21in wheels and 255/40-profile Goodyear Eagle tyres fitted to the prototypes I drove, the new iX3 felt calmer, more refined and consistently resolved.

'Resolved' is also a word that can be applied to the latest version of BMW's autonomous driving technology. The level-two-plus system has progressed significantly, gaining improved logic, smoother interventions and more intuitive controls, bringing it closer to the polished experience that premium car buyers expect. Included are revised functionality for automated lane changes and enhanced adaptive cruise control operation.

The iX3 doesn't just represent a significant step forward in terms of EV technology for BMW but a philosophical one, too. From packaging to performance, handling to digital display interfaces, this is BMW showing what an electric SUV should be like to drive. Forget repurposed ICE platforms and the sort of tentative steps that came after the original i3.

We will have to wait until September's Munich motor show to see the definitive production model and even longer for it to arrive in the UK. But for now, it seems Neue Klasse is the engineering reset BMW needed.

GREG KABLE

Interior layout has been completely redesigned with new digital tech

TECH SPEC

BMW iX3 PROTOTYPE

Sharper to drive, significantly more efficient and smarter inside. The Neue Klasse is off to a strong start

Price £60,000 (est)
Engine Asynchronous motor (f), separately excited synchronous motor (r)
Power 402bhp
Torque 443lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2300kg (est)
0-62mph Less than 5.0sec
Top speed 124mph (est)
Battery na
Range, economy 497 miles, na
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Audi A6 E-tron, Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV, Porsche Macan Electric

TESTED 4.6.25, HAMPSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

OMODA 9

Chinese newcomer claims to offer an Audi Q5 for Skoda Kodiaq money

Calling a car 'premium' is tricky these days, isn't it? After all, by objective measures, the new Omoda 9 is undeniably premium. At 4.75 metres long, it's lavishly spacious in the front and the back, it has LED lighting and sleek surfacing and it's brimming with standard technology including autonomous parking, a head-up display, heated and cooled seats in the front and back and more. It also has a whopping claimed electric range of 93 miles.

By any quantifiable benchmark, then, the 9 is a premium D-segment SUV that's equally as upmarket as the Volvo XC60, Audi Q5, Mercedes-Benz GLC, BMW X3 or Lexus RX.

And yet… Omoda was established by Chinese firm Chery only three years ago as a dedicated luxury brand to sell outside of its home country. As a result, the 9 could be fitted with a retractable chandelier and yet many buyers would perhaps understandably struggle to view it as 'premium'.

Omoda is perfectly aware of this, of course, and it's making up for it with the price. You can only get the 9 with a four-wheel-drive plug-in hybrid powertrain, badged Super Hybrid System (SHS), and the only cost option is paint colour. Everything else is included for £44,990, which makes it roughly £10,000 cheaper than the less generously equipped premium SUVs that we've already mentioned.

But that list price – and PCP finance prices of just under £600 per month after a £5000 deposit over a four-year contract – still puts the 9 in contention with alternatives like the Skoda Kodiaq, Kia Sportage, Hyundai Tucson, Peugeot 3008 and Volkswagen Tayron. All of which are from brands that have spent the past decade or so moving inexorably upmarket. As we said, this 'premium' classification is getting very messy.

Anyway, the 9 certainly feels classy inside. A single-piece display curves across the top of the dashboard, housing the touchscreen and accompanying driver's readout, and the nicely damped, physical rotary controls for the air conditioning and drive modes are welcome features.

There's tons of space in the back seats, too, with generous leg room and a nice, airy feel, courtesy of a standard panoramic sunroof.

The big (660-litre) boot space is fit for purpose but there's minimal underfloor storage and the fixed rear seats fold in a straightforward 60/40 split, so there are more

As with the smaller Omoda 5, the ride quality is sub-par

> **"It's an intriguing thing to drive and a big improvement on its disappointing Jaecoo 7 relative"**

OMODA
MT25 ZUA

TESTER'S NOTE

The rear seats recline electrically via Mercedes-style controls on the doors. But, weirdly, the switch that should slide the seat fore and aft is a fixed dummy button. **VP** versatile boots out there. There's no seven-seat version of the 9, either.

It's an intriguing thing to drive, and a big improvement on its disappointing Jaecoo 7 relative – perhaps unsurprisingly, because the 9 sits on a different platform. And because it's four-wheel drive (unlike the 7), with the front wheels powered by both petrol and electric power and the rear wheels powered by electric power only, the 9 feels confident and neutral even if you apply all 443bhp and 516lb ft of torque in one go.

The SHS powertrain also includes a three-speed, multi-clutch Dedicated Hybrid Transmission, which allows the engine to drive the wheels directly when full performance is required.

It's more often decoupled and either dormant or functioning purely as a generator to charge the 34.5kWh lithium-iron-phosphate battery, leaving the wheels to be driven by one or both of the electric motors.

When you're out of pure-electric range, the powertrain defaults to a Toyota-style full hybrid system, retaining enough battery power to continue boosting efficiency.

With a 93-mile claimed electric range and 70kW rapid charging, you probably won't need to bother the petrol engine very often anyway.

The result is that the 9 drives very much like a fully electric car. It's a fairly seamless build of acceleration – quiet yet muscular and easy to modulate.

There's very little shunt or hesitation as it switches between its EV and hybrid modes, and the petrol engine isn't intrusive in terms of the noise, other than an annoying background whine if you force it to charge the battery. It's all very smooth and calming.

Naturally, the steering weight and throttle response can be adjusted, as can the suspension, and even the brake pedal response can be tailored for a sharper response.

Annoyingly, the controls for all the adaptive features are spread across three different menus in the touchscreen, so adjusting them independently is a nightmarish faff. Sticking to the set-ups that are activated via the drive mode selector on the centre console is a lot easier.

Even if you do twizzle it into Sport mode, the steering remains light but predictable and tailored more to easy, relaxing progress.

The same can't be said for the suspension, which is wooden and jarring in Sport mode, while the everyday settings bring a loose-sprung, floaty attitude over most roads yet are still interspersed with thumps and shudders.

Overall, the 9 is an intriguing prospect. The tech and EV range are truly impressive, and it's pleasant enough to sit in and drive as long as you keep the suspension out of its Sport mode. You even get a seven-year or 100,000-mile warranty.

Yet when you can get cars as good as the Hyundai Tucson PHEV (or the excellent Skoda Superb iV if you can do without the SUV-ness) for similar money, the 9 still feels like a wildcard – especially as PCP prices aren't low.

If you can get a great deal, then don't discount it, and it could be a great company car option. But while the 9 is the best offering yet from Omoda, it may be another few years before the brand really finds its stride in the European market.

VICKY PARROTT

Cabin certainly looks premium and is very generously equipped

Rear is spacious and, thanks to that glass roof, airy despite its black finish

TECH SPEC

OMODA 9 SHS NOBLE

Much better in terms of refinement and handling, the electric range is phenomenal and it's good value. Even so, rivals make more sense

Price £44,990
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1499cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus two electric motors
Power 443bhp
Torque 516lb ft at 2000-4000rpm
Gearbox 3-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2195kg
0-62mph 4.9sec
Top speed 111mph
Battery 35.4/34.5kWh (total/usable)
Economy 166.1mpg
Electric range 93 miles
CO_2, tax band 38g/km, 6%
Rivals Hyundai Tucson Plug-in Hybrid, Skoda Kodiaq iV, Volkswagen Tayron eHybrid

“It’s significantly better to drive in hybrid mode than under petrol power alone”

TESTED 5.6.25, INGOLSTADT, GERMANY **DELIVERIES** NOW

AUDI A5 E-HYBRID

New executive car gains a tax-busting yet potent plug-in system

The plug-in hybrid renaissance continues. What was once merely a transition technology apparently now represents, in the words of Audi boss Gernot Döllner, “the best of both worlds”. Which makes the new Audi A5 E-hybrid rather an important car.

After all, this is Ingolstadt’s answer to the BMW 330e, a compact executive cruiser that can munch miles yet also offers significant electric running. And in order to take on that class leader, Audi has pushed hard to develop its PHEV technology. So much so, in fact, that the marketing team has introduced a catchy new moniker for it.

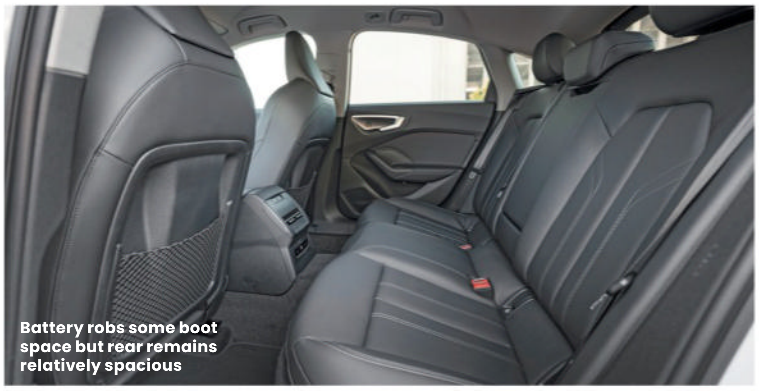
Döllner says the E-hybrid label has been coined to make the new PHEVs “recognisable at first glance”. I’m not fully sure it does, although it is at least refreshingly simple, coming from the brand that briefly tried to differentiate electric and petrol cars by odd and even numbers and previously used a model numbering system so loosely related to power output that it rivalled Donald Trump’s reciprocal tariff equation for befuddling opaqueness.

On which subject, just a reminder that this A5 is basically the new combustion-engined A4, which is what it would have been called had Audi seen sense and ditched the even/odd EV/ICE numbering thing a few months earlier.

The E-hybrid sits beside various petrol and diesel powertrains, many of them mild hybrids. It uses the 248bhp 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol ‘EA888’ engine, with an electric motor built into the seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox delivering up to 141bhp.

In the UK, it will be offered in a single flavour, with system outputs of 295bhp and 332lb ft, giving it a 0-62mph time of 5.9sec, no matter whether you choose the saloon or Avant estate. Other markets will also get a 362bhp version featuring the sporty bodykit from the S5.

The motor draws power from a 20.7kWh (usable) battery, which has 45% more capacity than those offered in previous Audi PHEVs and uses a new cell-to-pack design and revamped chemistry. It provides an electric-only range of 65 miles in our Edition 1 estate (stretching to



Battery robs some boot space but rear remains relatively spacious

Driving position and tech impress but material quality has regressed

IN A 5420E
A5

Ride was comfy but might be less so with UK-spec suspension

TESTER'S NOTE

Only 80% of the battery is actually usable – a lower percentage than in EVs. That's to protect battery life by ensuring it isn't regularly fully depleted, given the greater number of charge cycles that a small PHEV battery will undergo. **JA**

67 miles in a similar saloon), which is about the same as the 330e can offer. Official fuel economy is up to 131mpg, for what that's worth.

A tri-clutch transmission design allows the engine and motor to be fully disengaged when the other is running – a set-up that Audi says means the engine runs more efficiently when the battery is flat; it will still achieve 40.5mpg.

There are three levels of regenerative braking, which can recover between 25kW and 88kW of energy.

By default, the E-hybrid runs in EV mode and tries to power itself by electricity for as long as possible – or if you have a destination programmed into the sat-nav, it will automatically adjust for maximum efficiency.

Choose Hybrid mode and you can specify a custom charge level for the battery to be maintained at. It can be charged at a rate of 11kW.

The days when savvy fleet customers would buy a PHEV and never even unpack the charging cable are long gone. And indeed, the E-hybrid is significantly better to drive in hybrid mode than under petrol power alone.

With a charged battery, it feels close to an EV to drive: there's a hit of electric torque from pick-up, it's pleasingly smooth and the lack of engine noise shows how much heavy lifting the motor is doing.

In fact, in EV mode it's quite hard to make the engine kick in: even a pronounced stamp on the loud pedal won't make things particularly loud.

And when the engine is engaged, usually at higher speeds on the motorway or country roads to smooth the electric power or feed a bit of juice back into the battery, the transition is almost seamless.

I didn't have time to drain the battery on our test, but switching into S driving mode completely disengages the motor and lets you use the steering wheel-mounted paddles, which are usually used to control the regen, to change gear. It's actually disappointing, though: the engine feels a little gutless without the electric boost.

Even on the big 20in wheels of my top-spec test car, the ride and handling were good (albeit with the caveat that the car featured adaptive sport suspension not set for the UK), and there's barely any discernible difference in driving dynamics between the estate and saloon.

The battery does shrink the boot, mind: the E-hybrid estate offers 361 litres, down from 476 in other A5s. The E-hybrid saloon has 331 litres.

Inside, the E-hybrid is largely the same as any other A5, which means big touchscreens, shiny surfaces, pleasing switchgear and a few trim elements that don't feel quite as premium as you would expect from an Audi.

My £61k Edition 1 test car had all the kit; prices start at £49k for the saloon and £51k for the estate.

Buyers looking for some of the benefits of an EV with added flexibility will find much to appeal here. The E-hybrid may not shine dynamically, but it's a refined and well-rounded package.

JAMES ATTWOOD

TECH SPEC

AUDI A5 AVANT E-HYBRID EDITION 1 QUATTRO

A pleasingly rounded package that adds a strong option to the competitive PHEV market

Price £60,520
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1998cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 295bhp at 5000-6500rpm
Torque 332lb ft at 2000-4000rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2160kg
0-62mph 5.9sec
Top speed 155mph
Battery 25.9/20.7kWh (total/usable)
Economy 107.0-130.7mpg
Electric range 59-65 miles
CO_2, tax band 49-60g/km, 9-18%
Rivals BMW 330e Touring, Mercedes-Benz C300e Estate, Volvo V60 T6

TESTED 3.6.25, MADRID, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** AUTUMN

TOYOTA BZ4X

Toyota responds to criticism of electric family crossover with big update

The bZ4X, Toyota's all-important mid-size electric SUV (or Tesla fighter, if you want to be confrontational) didn't have the easiest start to life: delays, an early recall and then controversy over how big its battery actually was and how averse it was to cold weather.

Now it's facelift time, and as that original car didn't get the most rapturous reception, it's a pretty comprehensive one. The front fascia has been revised with slimmer headlights and the wheel-arch trims, which were unpainted black, are now gloss black.

More significantly, it has had a range boost, thanks to both a bigger battery and improved efficiency. By reconfiguring the shape of the pack and the gubbins surrounding it, the engineers have shoehorned in eight extra cells, taking its capacity from 71.4kWh to 73.1kWh (69.0kWh of which is usable).

There's also a new version with a smaller battery (57.7/54.0kWh), but I'm surprised that Toyota is planning to bring it to the UK at all, because that sort of thing rarely does well here.

By using silicon-carbide inverters and polishing the teeth (dentists recommend both mornings and evenings) of the gearbox, the engineers have also made the drivetrain use less energy, despite a useful bump in power.

Tweaks to the front subframe and extra adhesive in the floor have increased chassis rigidity, while the springs, dampers and bushings have been retuned to make it feel more settled and improve the ride, particularly for the rear passengers.

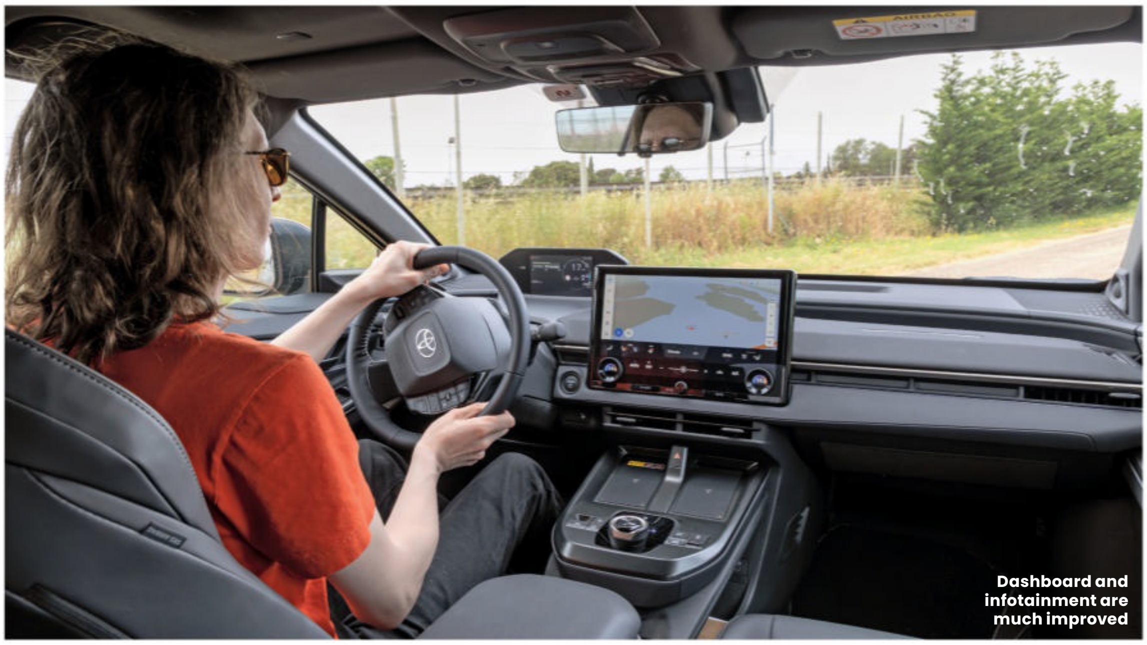
The interior also came in for some criticism before, so that has had a makeover too. These changes have been partially successful. The old gloss black centre console with a hidden phone storage is swapped for a matt one with two wireless charging pads – much better.

Aesthetic changes are limited to 'face' and exterior cladding

S 4749 BCL
PROTOTY

TESTER'S NOTE
For years, the screen in a Toyota or Lexus would be completely taken over by Apple CarPlay, so returning to the native software was a pain. Now the shortcut bar stays, making the whole thing miles easier to use. It's quite a nice system now. **IV**

“It treads a middle ground between the boaty Hyundai and try-hard sporty Tesla”



Dashboard and infotainment are much improved

The Lexus RZ has donated its larger, more sophisticated multimedia system, which means the bZ4X loses a few physical buttons overall, but most of those have moved onto a permanent toolbar on the touchscreen.

The last major change is that the pieces of fabric that lined the dashboard have been replaced with textured rubber. It’s soft to the touch and has a certain air of indestructibility about it, but the resulting sea of black does make the cabin look pretty dour.

The space inside hasn’t changed. Rear passengers have good knee room but there’s a high floor and the boot is merely adequate. The seats are still quite comfortable.

Like most EVs, the bZ4X never needed more power, but then it was one of the slower models in its class, so maybe it did. Either way, the dual-motor version has gained a rather substantial 124bhp (that’s an entire Citroën ë-C3), which has dropped its 0-62mph time by 1.8sec, and you can feel it: it’s really quite brisk now. With its more modest 20bhp boost, the single-motor version remains an adequate but unremarkable performer.

Some paddles have sprouted from the steering wheel to control the regenerative braking. There’s a free-wheeling mode but true one-pedal and adaptive modes remain absent. The by-wire brake pedal is nicely progressive.

I was slightly surprised that Toyota tinkered with the dynamics, because I always thought the bZ4X drove quite nicely, albeit in a slightly forgettable way. Thankfully, the car’s character hasn’t changed radically. It still treads a middle ground between the overtly boaty Hyundai Ioniq 5 and the more try-hard sporty Kia EV6 and Tesla Model Y that suits it well. Mostly the ride is nicely settled and the handling unexcitingly competent.

Wheel size (18in or 20in) has a negligible impact on ride comfort, although the car seems slightly quieter on the motorway with the smaller wheels. This may just be down to the different tyres, though.

Since its launch, the hot topic with the bZ4X has been range and charging. WLTP range has jumped from 286 to 314 miles for the dual-motor version on 18in wheels and from 312 to 354 miles for the single-motor version. The 20in wheels inflict a 20-30 mile penalty.

I didn’t get enough time in the dual-motor version to get a representative economy figure, but the single-motor version on 18in wheels returned 3.9mpkWh. For a big car like this, even in perfect weather, that’s pretty impressive, and it means that even though the battery is over 10kWh smaller than some rivals’, range is competitive. How the new car will hold up in the cold is the critical question; thankfully, it will be winter by the time we can deliver our UK verdict.

It should at least fast-charge better in cold conditions, which used to be a problem. The peak charging speed stays at 150kW, but the bZ4X has gained a pre-conditioning function to make sure it can hit that rate even in winter.

It’s too early for prices, but given that the bZ4X is currently a bit more expensive than the equivalent Ioniq 5 or Renault Scenic, I’d hope that Toyota would nibble at it a bit.

Toyota hasn’t been the most enthusiastic adopter of EVs, and that has shown in the product. This update doesn’t suddenly propel the bZ4X to the top of its class but has been quite effective in keeping it a solid, no-nonsense option with, in the case of the dual-motor version, some off-roadability. We’re still waiting for that breakout EV from Toyota, though.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

TOYOTA BZ4X 73KWH FWD

Should be much better to live with than before but remains a slightly anonymous option in its class

Price £40,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 221bhp
Torque 221lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1930kg
0-62mph 7.4sec
Top speed 100mph
Battery 73.1/69.0kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 354 miles, 4.6mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Skoda Enyaq, Tesla Model Y

TESTED 3.6.25, MADRID, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** FIRST HALF OF 2026

TOYOTA URBAN CRUISER

How good is the Suzuki eVitara in reality? Its Toyota twin has the answer

It's not déjà vu – it's the new Toyota Urban Cruiser. If this smaller sibling of the bZ4X looks familiar, it's because we recently drove the Suzuki eVitara, which is essentially the same car.

Toyota and Suzuki are all in on the not-so-noble art of badge engineering. It's been a few years since Suzuki started selling the Corolla estate and RAV4 as the Swace and Across, so now it's Suzuki's turn to return the favour.

Most of the development work for the Japanese firms' answer to the Kia EV3, Skoda Elroq and Renault Megane was done by Suzuki, with a bit of collaboration between the two on the base platform.

Mechanically, there are no differences at all, although the Urban Cruiser does get a slightly different face that has a bit of Toyota's 'Hammerhead' signature and the inside is always grey and black, rather than Suzuki's at least a bit more interesting brown dash.

In short, there are two batteries, both with lithium-iron-phosphate chemistry – one is 49kWh (47.8kWh usable), the other 61kWh (59.8kWh usable) – and they come with either a single front motor or a motor on each axle, although the four-wheel-drive car won't initially be offered in the UK and it's unlikely that the small-battery car will make much of a ripple in the sales statistics.

So what can we learn in Madrid that we couldn't from a drive of the Suzuki at a British proving ground? Well, actual roads with actual traffic do give a better idea of how well it performs in the real world.

The driving experience is decent. Shame about the range and ADAS, then

The touchscreen is different from other Toyotas'. Worse, too

To drive, it's actually quite nice, with enough grip, well-weighted steering and a good balance of body control and ride comfort. The seats are quite narrow but actually have plenty of adjustment. There is quite a bit of wind noise on the motorway, though.

Both the front- and four-wheel-drive versions are quick enough and their power is easy to mete out.

The regen is progressive too, but while the button with a picture of a shoe on a pedal promises one-pedal driving, it doesn't deliver it.

Apart from that, the whole thing feels slightly phoned in. The sliding rear bench gives you competitive rear seat space or boot space but not both. The infotainment, which is unique to the Urban Cruiser and eVitara, is incredibly slow, which will become painfully evident when you try to disable the various ADAS – and you will want to, because the lane keeping assistance is quite aggressive, the overspeed warning is typically annoying and while the driver monitoring system was okay for me, it didn't seem to like my co-driver's face (I can confirm that he wasn't distracted).

Range, efficiency and charging all seem a little previous-generation too: the long-range Urban Cruiser is only about on the level of the standard-range versions of the Elroq and EV3. The official mpkWh figures are fine if unremarkable, but in practice it seemed to be in the mid-threes in perfect conditions. A rapid-charging speed of 80kW for the standard-range car and 125kW for the long-range car are off the pace too, as is Toyota's predicted 10-80% time of 45 minutes.

UK prices haven't been published yet, but the standard-range car will cost €33k (£28k) in the Netherlands and the long-range car €36k (£30k), which is cheaper than the EV3. That still doesn't make it spectacularly cheap, which it would have to be to make up for its various weaknesses.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

TOYOTA URBAN CRUISER 61KWH

Quite nice to drive but otherwise off the pace of rivals

Price £31,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 172bhp
Torque 142lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1839kg
0-62mph 8.7sec
Top speed 93mph
Battery 61.0/59.8kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 265 miles, 4.1mpkWh
CO$_2$, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Kia EV3, Ford Puma Gen-E, Skoda Elroq

TESTER'S NOTE

Toyota and Suzuki warranty the battery for 70% of its capacity for 10 years or 600,000 miles, so long as the car goes in for a service at a dealer every year. With most manufacturers, it's eight years and far fewer miles. **IV**

UK VERDICTS

TESTER'S NOTE
The steering wheel has an array of blank buttons, whose functions flash up in the driver display when you touch them lightly. Many don't seem to do anything, despite there being a bunch of things for which the 3 is missing buttons. **IV**

TESTED 28.5.25, OXFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** JULY

POLESTAR 3 SINGLE MOTOR

Athletic SUV becomes lighter, rangier and cheaper. Deal of the century?

When we road tested the Polestar 3 (Autocar, 12 February), we found it delivered on the unlikely promise of a big electric SUV for the keen driver, and at a price that undercut most rivals. Efficiency (and thus range) was disappointing, however. That's where this new entry-level version comes in.

As the name suggests, the Long Range Single Motor (LRSM) uses the same 107kWh battery pack as the Long Range Dual Motor (LRDM) but does with just the rear motor, albeit in a more powerful state of tune.

So this 3 is cheaper (£70k versus £76k) and more efficient (3.1 versus 2.9mpkWh WLTP) and thus has a longer range (438 versus 395 miles). What's not to like? After all, with the vast majority of EVs, the 'lesser' version is the one to have for exactly these reasons, and because they tend to be nicer to drive.

However, the LRSM also loses some of the LRDM's chassis tech. The adaptively damped air suspension is replaced by coil springs with frequency-selective dampers and hydraulic bump stops. And in place of the clever torque-splitting device on the rear axle, there's now a conventional open differential.

The engineers say they have tuned it to feel much like the LRDM in its default Comfort mode, with a focus on front-end grip. Unfortunately, it hasn't really worked. Along with the chassis kit, the LRSM has lost much of what makes the 3 unique – and particularly appealing. Driving the two versions back to back on the same roads, it's remarkable how much less turn-in bite and steering feel the LRSM has.

Where the LRDM demonstrates lucid agility as it rotates through a corner on the power, the LRSM needs to be pushed much harder before the chassis starts to come alive – only for the stability control to clumsily take away the power, even with the ESC in Sport mode.

While 295bhp sounds a healthy amount, this is still a 2.4-tonne car, so it results in 0-62mph in 7.5sec. That's fine, but given the 3's sporty aspirations, you can't help but expect something punchier. For reference, the single-motor Porsche Macan Electric has 335bhp and takes 5.7sec.

Drivability is first-rate, though: the pedals respond progressively and you can choose your level of regeneration, including free-wheeling and one-pedal modes, and whether you want the car to creep like a torque-converter auto or not.

As for the LRSM's other main selling point of efficiency: on my test drive in mild spring weather, I saw 3.0mpkWh – decent, if not exactly setting new class standards. That should make for comfortably over 300 miles of range.

Otherwise, the 3 is as before. That means the interior is spacious, comfortable and fashioned from some very appealing materials. My test car had the 'animal welfare wool in charcoal', which looks more like a nice black cloth than the very overtly sheepy material in some Volvos but is still a nice change from the ubiquitous leather.

Unfortunately, it still suffers from some underbaked tech. Connecting to Apple CarPlay took a few tries and the built-in media player kept pausing itself. The menu structures are less convoluted than they are in the technically related Volvo EX90, but many actions still take a few too many taps of the touchscreen. Not being able to adjust the following distance for the adaptive cruise control or easily toggle the lane tracing feature grates too.

At the time of writing, there are offers on that actually make the LRDM only £2000 more expensive than the LRSM, but even if the gap widens, choosing between the two 3s seems like a very easy decision. A rare exception to the rule that the single-motor car is the one to have.

ILLYA VERPRAET

Dynamism is diminished by loss of torque splitter and fancy suspension

Plush materials lift familiarly minimalist Scandi interior

TECH SPEC

POLESTAR 3 LONG RANGE SINGLE MOTOR

Cheaper and more efficient but feels like a de-contented version of what the 3 was meant to be

★★★☆☆

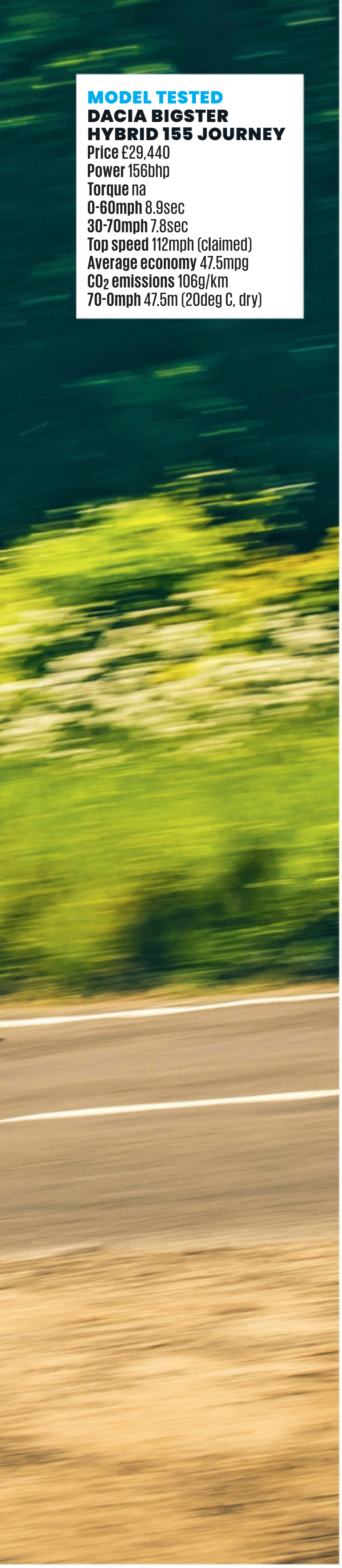
Price £69,910
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 295bhp
Torque 361lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 2403kg
0-62mph 7.5sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 111/107kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 438 miles, 3.1-3.5mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Audi Q6 E-tron, Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5754

DACIA BIGSTER

Has Dacia reprised the Duster magic in the next-size-up Bigster?



MODEL TESTED
DACIA BIGSTER HYBRID 155 JOURNEY
Price £29,440
Power 156bhp
Torque na
0-60mph 8.9sec
30-70mph 7.8sec
Top speed 112mph (claimed)
Average economy 47.5mpg
CO_2 emissions 106g/km
70-0mph 47.5m (20deg C, dry)

The Dacia Bigster is a Dacia Duster, but bigger; sometimes naming cars doesn't have to be complicated. It's a slightly silly name, but we'll get used to it. Being named after a household cleaning tool hasn't been a barrier to success for Dacia's other SUV, after all, and it's good to know where a particular model sits in the hierarchy.

Despite the overt similarities with the Duster, the Bigster does differ in a few respects. Injecting more practicality into the Duster wasn't the work of an afternoon, and the new car also introduces an improved hybrid system.

Perhaps even more significant is that the Bigster is Dacia's entry into the C-SUV segment – a wildly popular class that includes the Kia Sportage, Ford Kuga and Volkswagen Tiguan, to name just a few of the leading lights.

Whereas with most car makers this class represents quite a step up from the one below in terms of technical sophistication, Dacia actually sticks with the same CMF-B platform for the Bigster. As its name suggests, these are effectively the underpinnings for a B-segment car – a supermini.

Dacia's general charm and price advantage get it a long way; the question now is whether that extends deep into the lion's den of one of Europe's biggest classes.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★⯪

PROS Clever cost-saving; no wider than a Duster; mild-hybrid and full-hybrid powertrains; 4WD available
CONS Lacks some identity of its own; less sophisticated than similarly sized cars

While Dacia's approach still relies on adopting technology developed for use in the wider Renault Group, it has become rather more sophisticated than it used to be, and is even allowed the occasional first.

Given they're about the same size, you might expect the Bigster to be derived from the Renault Austral. However, Dacia takes a more bottom-up approach to car development, building a model to a budget from the components available around the group, and thus avoiding unnecessary cost.

As a result, the Bigster uses the lower-cost CMF-B platform, though it must be said that Renault's platform strategy seems more flexible than the ones at Stellantis and the Volkswagen Group.

Duster also sits on the CMF-B platform

This means that the Bigster deviates from the cars it is related to in a few notable ways. Despite being a bigger Duster, its powertrain line-up effectively moves on a generation.

The entry-level engine is a mild-hybrid 1.2-litre three-cylinder with a six-speed manual gearbox. In front-wheel-drive configuration, it puts out slightly more power (138bhp) than in the Duster (128bhp). When optioned with four-wheel drive, it's in the same, lower state of tune.

The version we're testing is the full hybrid. Fundamentally, it's the same E-Tech hybrid system we've known from Renault for a few years. The petrol engine is mated to a clutchless gearbox where the engine can use four ratios, and the main electric drive motor can use two. A secondary ISG-style motor is used to start the engine, and adjust its rpm to rev-match and enable gearshifts.

This is the cheaper four-speed system rather than the five-speed version in the Renault Rafale and Austral. The difference with the Duster is that the petrol engine is upgraded from 1.6 to 1.8 litres with an extra 18lb ft for more accessible performance. The drive battery grows from 1.2kWh to 1.4kWh. Presumably, this configuration will make its way to the Duster and other Renault Group cars in time.

Another unusual aspect, given it's derived from small cars, is that the Bigster is available with four-wheel drive. At the moment, this is achieved by adding a multi-plate clutch and a propshaft to the mild-hybrid driveline – as is conventional for four-wheel drive systems with a transverse engine. Four-wheel-drive versions of the full-hybrid Duster and Bigster – with an electric motor on the rear axle – are expected by the end of the year. Four-wheel-drive Dacias use a multi-link rear axle to accommodate the driveshafts, whereas front-wheel-drive ones have a torsion beam.

INTERIOR

★★★⯪☆

PROS Practical; enough physical controls
CONS Looks and feels quite cheap; other cars are roomier; poor seat comfort

Given the Bigster and a Duster are the same from the B-pillar forwards, it's no surprise that they are all but identical from the driver's seat. The front seats, driving position and dashboard are much the same – it's the second row and the luggage area that benefit from the Bigster's bigness.

By our measurements, rear leg room increases by 50mm to 690mm. That's down slightly on cars like the VW Tiguan and Renault Austral, but still enough for adults to have enough space. Head room is generous too, and there are two USB-C ports and a pair of air vents.

■ Bigster is the first Dacia to be available with 19in wheels, which come with Journey trim. They look good but don't do the ride any favours. Expression gets 17in wheels, Extreme 18in. In addition, the mild-hybrid 4x4 gains all-season tyres for some mild off-road capability.

■ There are YouClip points dotted around the cabin, to which you can attach various accessories such as lights and storage boxes. Our car had the phone holder next to the infotainment screen (pictured overleaf). Useful, but it did creak and rattle annoyingly.

Thanks to rear doors that are long enough not to look out of place on a long-wheelbase Mercedes S-Class, access is easy too.

Most of the Bigster's additional length has gone into boot space, which measures 677 litres in the front-wheel-drive mild hybrid, 629 litres in the four-wheel-drive mild hybrid and 612 litres in the full hybrid, which is bigger than the Kia Sportage Hybrid's 587 litres. Indeed, by our measurements, the Bigster's boot is both longer and wider than the Sportage's. The floor is flat too, with a decent amount of space underneath, which can optionally (£300) accommodate a spacesaver spare wheel, even in the full hybrid.

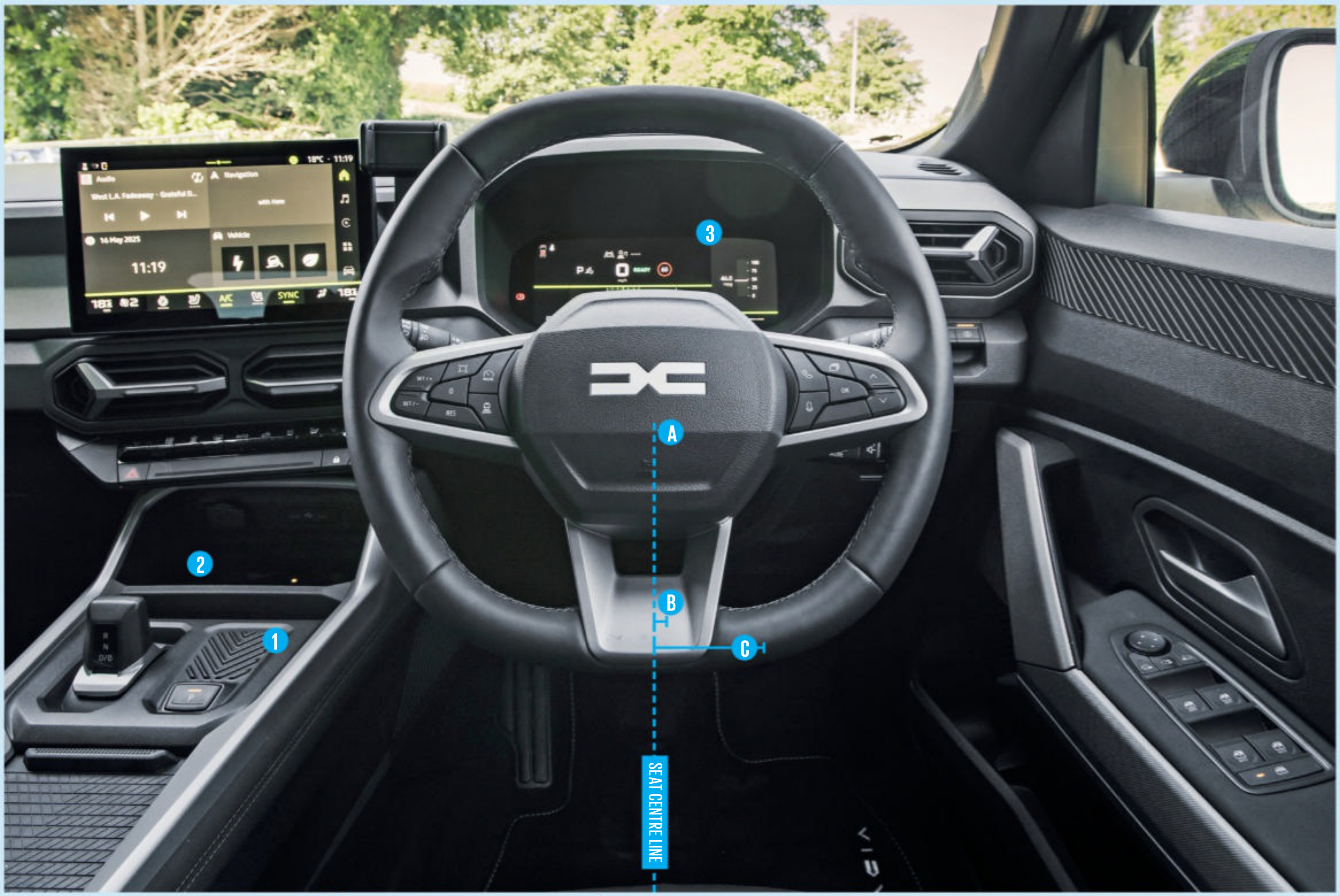
Some of the Bigster's upgrades compared with other Dacias only become obvious at second glance. This model needs to conquer Germany, where buyers have notoriously high demands, so Dacia held numerous customer clinics. Some of the features that turned out to be non-negotiable for many buyers were dual-zone climate control (standard equipment), an electric tailgate (standard on Journey trim) and a panoramic sunroof. The sunroof is standard ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Given this moulding is the same shape as the gear selector, you might expect them to be flipped in LHD cars, but that's not the case. An extra cupholder or tray would have been useful.

② There's a ledge here that can support a mobile phone in landscape orientation, underneath the proper phone holder. Behind that is a tray with a wireless phone charger.

③ The driver display is clear and not overloaded with information or graphic fripperies. Some more configurability and the option of a tacho would have been welcome.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 20mm right Ⓑ Brake offset 20mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 150mm right. Pedal and steering alignment is conventional, and you don't notice the slight steering offset. Wheel is nice and thin but a slightly strange shape.

◂ on Extreme and an option on Journey. At £500, it's quite reasonably priced too, and unlike on a BMW 5 Series it actually opens.

While the Bigster's not short of equipment, some of the fixtures and fittings that are perfectly acceptable in lower segments start to look a little second-rate compared with cars like the Sportage or even the MG HS. With the exception of some fabric on the armrests and where you might rest your left knee against the centre console, hard plastics dominate. Taller testers also took issue with the seats, which lack thigh support and front-to-rear adjustability.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★⯪☆

PROS Pleasantly simple, but has all the functionality it needs

CONS Not outstandingly full of features; some lag

You certainly wouldn't buy a Dacia if fully featured multimedia was a priority, though the relative simplicity might be a draw to some. The on-screen buttons are large, the menus are uncomplicated and the structure is easy to fathom.

The built-in navigation isn't a patch on Google Maps or Waze for clarity or traffic awareness but could be useful in a pinch, and the screen generally doesn't respond particularly quickly. The whole thing seems to be developed with the assumption that most drivers will just use Apple CarPlay or Android Auto (both available with or without a wire), which is probably accurate. Essential vehicle settings such as the climate control and ADAS menus remain easily accessible at all times.

PERFORMANCE

★★★☆☆

PROS Generally smooth; mechanically complex yet simple in operation

CONS Some quirks remain; handling of regen; braking distances

The Bigster's E-Tech hybrid system with a new engine may be a substantial upgrade on the Duster, but by and large the way it operates is very familiar. Because there is no clutch, it always sets off on the electric motor, and because that is reasonably powerful, at 50bhp, the engine might not fire up for a long time, particularly at lower speeds.

When it does, it may either sit at a fixed rpm to spin the generator and top up the battery, or it may power the car directly. It sounds somewhat coarse when it's working hard, but because it's torquier than in previous iterations, that's not actually too often. Some of the E-Tech system's other less pleasant traits – such as slow gearchanges and keeping the engine revs high on inclines – haven't been completely eliminated but are noticeably reduced and rarely intrusive.

The hybrid system with the 1.6-litre engine could sometimes use up most of its battery, impacting performance, but this new version is much more diligent about replenishing the battery, which itself is larger too. This has eliminated such issues.

The slow gearchanges remain most obvious under full throttle. During our acceleration runs, there was a point, at around 80mph, where the Bigster stopped gaining speed for about a second, as the electric motor has to hold the fort by itself while the engine and gearbox switch ratios. In normal driving, where the software can more carefully pick its shift points and there is more power in reserve, this is simply not an issue.

Despite being slightly heavier, the Bigster enjoys a useful bump in performance compared with the Duster, requiring 0.7sec less to get to 60mph and 4.5sec less to reach 90mph. It's still clearly slower than a Kia Sportage Hybrid, but no less pleasant to drive.

Both the accelerator and brake pedal are easy to modulate, but we wish the regenerative braking was handled differently. When you lift off the accelerator in D, there is fairly strong regen, which seems unnecessary since there is also a B mode on the gear selector for even stronger regen. The Bigster lacks an auto-hold function too and will always creep forwards from a stop when you release the brake pedal.

We found the Bigster's braking performance a little underwhelming. We recorded a 47.5m stopping distance from 70mph on our first stop, which is just adequate. All our subsequent stops were around 50m, however. Similarly, a 59.2m stopping distance in the wet is okay, but the Mazda CX-30 needed just 53.9m.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Intuitive, natural handling; comfortable long-wave ride
CONS Not especially incisive; 19in wheels affect secondary ride; some vibrations at motorway speed

Dacia's low-cost philosophy means that the majority of Bigsters aren't blessed with the most sophisticated suspension or the most generous sound insulation. Apart from the four-wheel-drive versions, all have a torsion beam rear axle when multi-links are more common in the class, and it was never going to get the highest-quality dampers.

But Dacia has shown in the past that the set-up and tuning are just as important as the hardware, and so it proves again with the Bigster. Like the Duster, it is resolutely not sporty, but there is a general consistency to the way it drives that makes it quite enjoyable in an unassuming way.

While the steering is fairly slow, light and not the most precise, the end result is intuitive and relaxing, and more appropriate than a hyperactive rack would be. The Bigster responds to inputs in a natural way too. Although it rolls a fair bit and runs out of grip relatively soon, it does so progressively, and the steering will warn you before it happens. Lifting off the accelerator neatly neutralises any understeer and the stability control generally works unintrusively.

Our test car came on Michelin e-Primacy tyres, which are very economy-focused. We suspect that even mid-range Primacy 5 rubber would noticeably sharpen the handling with no penalty in comfort and only a slight one in economy.

The benefit of the Bigster's soft suspension is that it rides fairly well. It's particularly adept at ironing out the big bumps, giving it a pliant high-speed gait. Allowing for our test car's 19in wheels (albeit with a fairly generous 55-aspect sidewall), it handled the sharper stuff relatively well too. The ride never feels brittle; at worst a little clunky. With that said, we would stick with the 17in or 18in wheels of the Expression or Extreme trims.

Acoustic refinement paints a more mixed picture. A reading of 69dBA at 70mph shows that more noise enters the cabin at a cruise than in most other cars in the class, even if it stays at an acceptable level. More annoying were the slight vibrations that gently buzzed through the structure at motorway speeds. It's hard to pinpoint the source, but given they were accompanied by some distant humming from the engine, we suspect built-to-a-cost engine mounts.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★★★☆

PROS Mandatory safety systems aren't overly intrusive – and are easy to turn off
CONS No blindspot monitoring; adaptive cruise control isn't great

Like all recent Renault and Dacia products, the Bigster features 'My Safety Perso', where you can pick which assisted driving systems you want, and which ones you don't. When you get into the car from then on, you simply press a physical button twice to load this configuration.

While this makes it easy to silence the undesirables, the Bigster's other systems leave some room for improvement. There's no blindspot monitoring, for one. Some versions (including our test car) are fitted with adaptive cruise control, which is fairly smooth and not overly given to braking for phantom obstacles, but it starts slowing down for slower traffic very early, and even its closest following distance is quite far.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★★

PROS Cheap to buy; fuel economy
CONS No heated seats on Expression trim

Affordability is Dacia's whole raison d'être, and unsurprisingly the Bigster does extremely well here. Prices start from £25,215 for a Mild Hybrid 140 in Expression trim, and apart from heated seats there isn't much essential equipment it lacks.

A Hybrid 155, like our test car, carries a £2975 premium. This may seem a lot, but it will be more economical and also adds an automatic gearbox. Journey and Extreme trims add £1250 and £1500 to the price, respectively. Journey is more road-focused and gains 19in wheels and the electric tailgate, while Extreme is more adventure-themed, with 18in wheels, the panoramic sunroof and the modular roof bars. The most expensive Bigster we could put together on the configurator was £31,290, which is only slightly dearer than the cheapest Kia Sportage. The MG HS is the only rival that matches the Bigster on price, but that's for a standard petrol version. Dacia offers some very competitive finance deals as well.

We found our full-hybrid test car very economical in the real world, so it should prove cheap to run as well as to buy. It behaved slightly unusually in our economy tests at Horiba MIRA, struggling with the combination of 70mph and banked turns and returning a slightly lacklustre touring economy figure of 41.8mpg. However, it more than made up for this with a stellar urban economy of 72.4mpg. In daily, motorway-heavy running, we generally observed mid-50s MPG. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1030mm, head room 1090mm. Bigster suffers from a shortage of front leg room and flat seats with crude lumbar support.

REAR Leg room 690mm, head room 1025mm. It doesn't set new standards for space, but even taller adults won't struggle to get comfortable.

BOOT Length 1060-1830mm, width 1000-1380mm, height 430-720mm. Boot area is big and flat, and there's another 100mm of height under the floor.

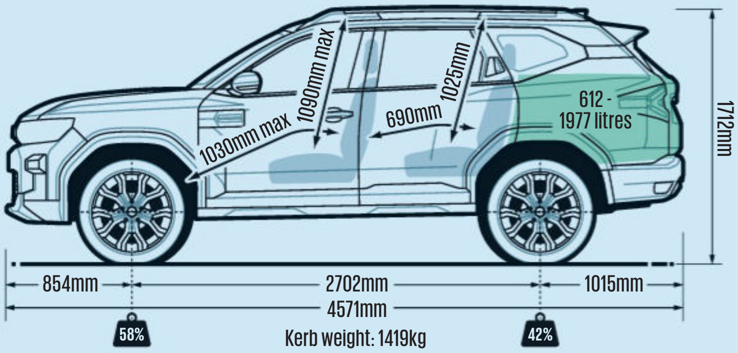
"The Bigster rides fairly well, with a pliant high-speed gait"

DACIA
NA25 WHB
BIGSTER

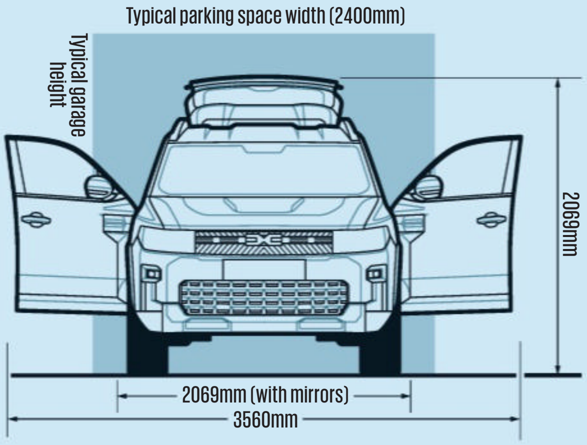
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4571mm **Width** 2069mm/1812mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1712mm **Door span** 3560mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2069mm


1090mm max
1025mm
690mm
1030mm max
612 - 1977 litres
1712mm
854mm
2702mm
1015mm
4571mm
58%
42%
Kerb weight: 1419kg

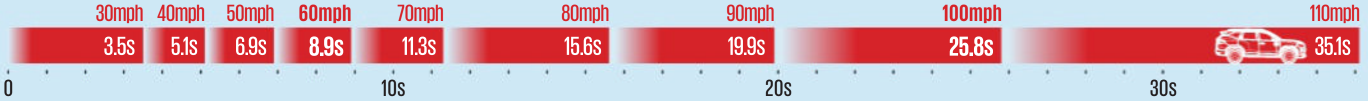
PARKING


Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2069mm
2069mm (with mirrors)
3560mm

ACCELERATION

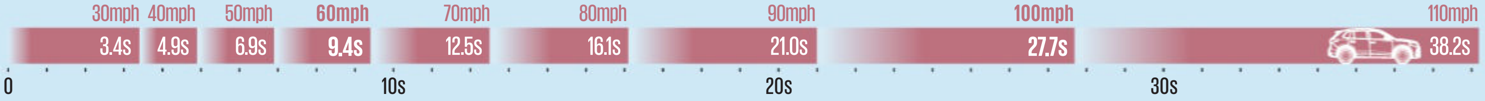
Test conditions 20deg C, dry and windy

Standing quarter mile 17.0sec at 83.8mph **Standing km** 30.9sec at 106.6mph **30-70mph** 7.8sec **50-80mph** 8.6sec **0-62mph** 9.4sec



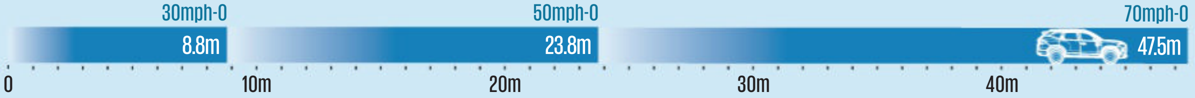
Volkswagen Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150 R-Line (2024, 14deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 17.2sec at 82.7mph **Standing km** 31.3sec at 104.2mph **30-70mph** 9.2sec **50-80mph** 9.2sec

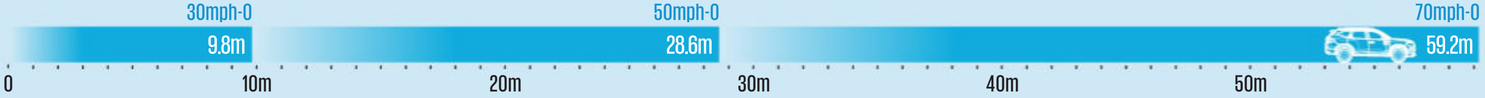


BRAKING

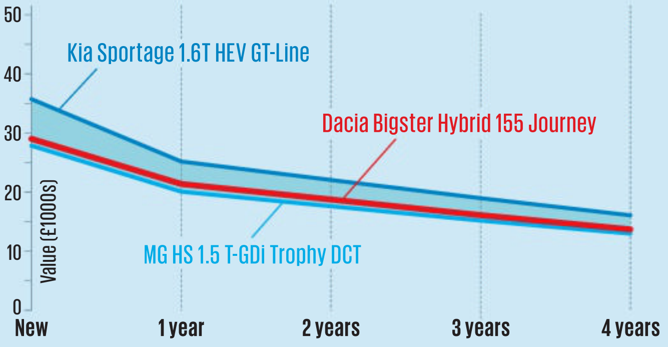
Dry 60-0mph 2.8sec



Wet 60-0mph 3.3sec

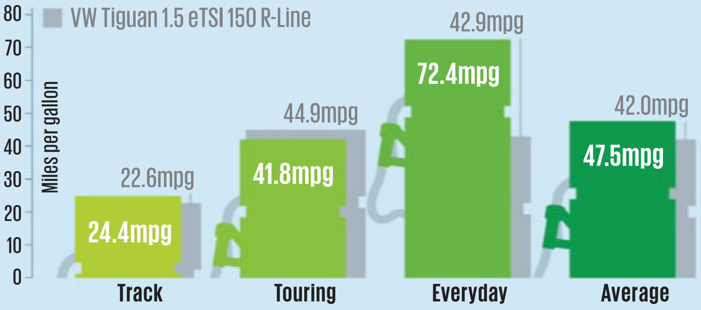


DEPRECIATION

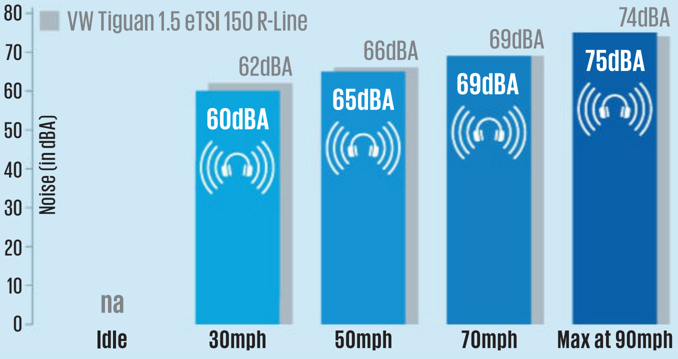


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 60.1mpg (combined) **Test range** 523/460/796 miles (average/touring/everyday)

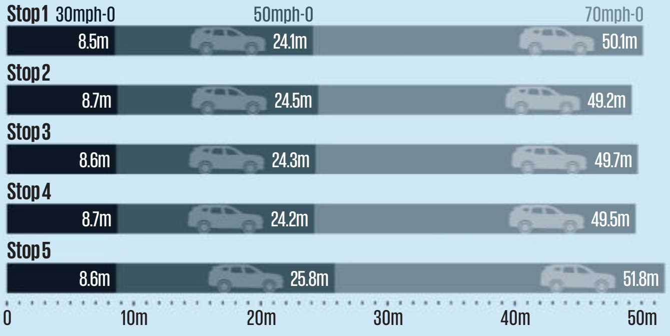


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 1.7m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

DACIA BIGSTER HYBRID 155 JOURNEY

On-the-road price £29,440
Price as tested £31,040
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £16,100
Contract hire £417 pcm (£2506 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £396 pcm (£4656 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles, £17,307 final payment)
Insurance group 28A

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard Keyless entry, heated seats and wheel, two-zone climate
Optional Two-tone paint £1300, spacesaver spare wheel £300
Also available Sunroof £500

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Front, transverse, FWD
Type 4 cyls in line, 1789cc, petrol; 106bhp at 5300rpm, 127lb ft at 3000rpm
Motor Permanent magnet synchronous motor, gearbox-mounted; 50bhp, 151lb ft; plus ISG
Battery Lithium ion, 1.4kWh (total)
Voltage 230V
Total power 156bhp
Total torque na
Power to weight 110bhp per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 4-spd automatic (engine), 2-spd automatic (electric motor)
Ratios/mph per 1000rpm
1st EV 13.06/6.4 **2nd EV** 4.35/19.1
1st ICE 13.20/6.3 **2nd ICE** 6.33/13.1
3rd ICE 3.85/21.5 **4th ICE** 2.88/28.8
rpm in top gear at 70/80mph (ICE) 2432/2779

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1419kg/na
Weight distribution (f/r) 58%/42%
Wheels 7.0Jx19in
Tyres 205/55 R19 97H, Michelin e-Primacy
Spare Spacesaver (135/80 R17 103M, Continental sContact)
Fuel tank 50 litres (under rear seats, filler on offside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear Torsion beam, coil springs
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.7 turns lock to lock; 11.0m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 296mm ventilated discs
Rear 290mm solid discs
Handbrake type Electronic, switch

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 3 stars (2024)
Adult occupant 69%, child occupant 85%, vulnerable road users 60%, safety assist 57%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 106g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £138/£275

VERDICT

Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature

★★★★☆

Although the C-segment is only one step up from the B-segment, the difference seems bigger, particularly for Dacia. Where the Duster is simply a good car at an unbeatable price in the B-segment, the Bigster wades into a more serious battle with only a slightly higher grade of weapons.

Is a Dacia Bigster on the same level as a Hyundai Tucson, a VW Tiguan or a Nissan Qashqai? Quite simply, no. It can't match those cars for interior quality, tech features or sophistication on the road.

But then it's not priced to be. And, equally, it's not a million miles off. If you're not bothered by the handful of concessions to value that Dacia has made, this is still a blinder of a deal – for a car that is roomy, economical, well equipped and broadly quite nice to drive. Dacia does it again.

TESTERS' NOTES

ILLYA VERPRAET
My preferred spec would be the mild hybrid in Expression trim, because apart from heated seats it has everything I need. I prefer its denim seat fabric and smaller wheels too. The irony of budget brand Dacia is that most buyers go for the most expensive trim and engine.

MATT SAUNDERS
If rear passengers want a central armrest with cupholders, they have to fold down the whole middle seat, leaving the dog free to escape the boot. Dacia cost-saving in action: you get a 40/20/40-split folding rear seat and an armrest, but there's a catch.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Fit some better tyres.
- Upgrade the interior ergonomics and perceived quality.
- Give the driver options for the regen and auto hold.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	DACIA BIGSTER HYBRID 155 JOURNEY					
		SKODA KAROQ 1.5 TSI DSG SE EDITION Skoda's medium SUV is getting on a bit, but it's comfortable, easy to use and decent value. Not a hybrid.	**CITROEN C5 AIRCROSS HYBRID MAX** About to be replaced but surprisingly plush and pretty good value.	**HYUNDAI TUCSON HYBRID PREMIUM** Stylish, surprisingly plush inside and quite fast. ADAS can be intrusive. Similar to Sportage.	**MG HS 1.5T DCT** Only MG can compete with Dacia on price and kit. Nicer interior, but not as easy to use or good to drive. Thirsty.	**SUZUKI S-CROSS 1.4 MOTION** Mild-hybrid S-Cross is basic but rides well and is frugal and good value. Just avoid the full hybrid.
		★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★½☆	★★★½☆
Price		£33,565	£33,745	£38,720	£30,245	£28,049
Power, torque		148bhp, 184lb ft	144bhp, 170lb ft	227bhp, 258lb ft	168bhp, 203lb ft	127bhp, 173lb ft
0-62mph, top speed		9.0sec, 130mph	10.2sec, 124mph	8.0sec, 120mph	9.6sec, 121mph	9.5sec, 121mph
CO_2, economy		140g/km, 46.0mpg	127g/km, 49.6mpg	130g/km, 49.6mpg	173g/km, 37.2mpg	121g/km, 53.2mpg

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BMW's shock supercar
The Autocar
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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

Compare a Genesis interior with a Mercedes one to see how luxury cabin design has diverged

Road testers like me have expended plenty of column inches over the past couple of decades writing about something we call perceived quality. It may seem a slightly mysterious concept. Some readers think we imagine it entirely; others that we simply place too great importance on it. So what follows is a short effort to explain a phenomenon that has had a large influence on the development of the car industry in the 21st century.

It's not to be confused with manufacturing quality. When car industry types refer to quality in the broadest sense, this is what they tend to mean – ostensibly the capacity of a production line, be it automated or not, to produce accurately and correctly made cars without defect in repeatable fashion.

Perceived quality isn't about whether body panels align correctly, whether door seals stop the wind properly, what paint finish is like and whether a car built on a Friday afternoon is the same as one from a Tuesday morning. As much as those things may indeed be more meaningful indicators of a car's quality, they're indicators that you typically need at least a little bit of an eye or ear to spot. Perceived quality, by contrast, is the kind that exists entirely so you will spot it.

Volkswagen fussed – and we mean *fussed* – over this Golf interior

> “Ambient lighting has taken the place of haptic appeal”

Most road testers would agree that the idea of putting fixtures, fittings and features into car interiors that look and feel expensive and that move in a similar way for its own sake was popularised by German manufacturers in the early 1990s. Search through Autocar's digital archive for the first usage of the phrase in the intended sense and it crops up in our first drive of the B4-generation Audi 80 Avant in July 1992.

That seems like about the right moment. Audi was striking out to make a new name for the superior quality of its cars. Tester Steve Sutcliffe confirmed explicitly how “good to touch, good to look at and exquisitely finished” so many parts of the 80's cabin were.

The trend wasn't contained to luxury or executive models, though. The Mk4 Volkswagen Golf, for example, came as a transformative moment for perceived quality when it appeared in 1997. This was Wolfsburg's big reply to the landmark Ford Focus. The story goes that when Volkswagen executive chairman Ferdinand Piëch first sat in a development car, he slid the driver's seat all the way back, looked down and immediately demanded that the car's front seat mountings be re-engineered so that he couldn't see their running tracks. Just because. And, more amazingly, the stature of Piëch meant it actually happened.

Now times could hardly be more different. Many manufacturers prefer to spend the budget that years ago they might have ploughed into over-engineered cantilevered ashtrays and air-conditioning controls that clicked like buttons on a Swiss watch on larger and larger digital screens, the existence of which often saves that same manufacturer from including so many physical switches anyway. Ambient lighting has taken the place of haptic appeal.

In some showrooms, you have to go a long way and spend an awful lot of money to find a luxury interior that really feels expensive.

Not if you know where to look, however. The most expensive, high-quality-feeling interiors of our current crop of cars aren't made in Germany any more but in markets that have been more reticent about adopting digital cabin technology. I would say Lexus, Genesis and Mazda are among the leading powers now.

But the real gift of perceived quality has been to drag the prevailing standard of fit-and-finish and material quality up by its bootlaces, right across the board, from Ford to Fisker to Ferrari and back again. Thirty years ago, material cheapness still abounded in places where it really shouldn't have. Today, what we might call ‘baseline’ perceived quality is an awful lot higher.

Looking for

The Land Rover Defender Octa promises to be fast, fun and formidable off road, but can another car do it better? **MATT SAUNDERS** finds out

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

rubble

The emergence of the dual-purpose, loose-surface-specialist, off-road performance car is one of the better reasons for enthusiastic drivers like us to be cheerful. From the Porsche 911 Dakar and Lamborghini Huracán Sterrato right the way through to the Ford Ranger Raptor and Bowler Bulldog, we've had quite a constant and varied supply of these lovably rogue and madcap mud-pluggers over the past 10 years of car industry history.

And now, if you want to go fast and have fun on gravel and mud as well as on the road in 2025, you can do so in all kinds of different ways. Take, for example, the three fast off-roaders we have gathered at the Sweet Lamb Motorsport Complex in Wales for what should be a fantastic day of testing. They are, respectively, appealingly little, usably mid-sized and unapologetically large. Hobbyist, daily driver and indomitable do-it-all.

We've got rear-engined rear-wheel drive, all-electric four-wheel drive and V8-engined, proper mechanical four-wheel drive on offer, to suit whatever your requirement. These cars are about as different from each other as anything you're likely to see sharing space in an Autocar comparison test. But all should be great fun on what is ostensibly a gravel rally stage that's ours for the day.

At just 715kg, the Ariel Nomad 2 is the kind of flyweight thrill-seeker most would stick on a trailer to transport and use. One towed by something like the 2510kg Land Rover Defender Octa, quite possibly. Could the tow car actually be as much fun as what's towed? Could it get close? Let's see. At 2343kg, meanwhile, the Ford Mustang Mach-E Rally isn't far behind the range-topping Defender on kerb weight, although it comfortably beats it for torque-to-weight ratio and claimed on-asphalt 0-62mph sprinting – not least because it's electric. On wheel travel, any-surface traction and towing capacity? Not so much.

A Nomad on the loose is so much more fun than one on track, or even on the road. Context is everything for this car. It has character and charm everywhere but true X-factor in its natural environment.

Nomad takes off and lands with aplomb, thanks to its light weight and Öhlins suspension

“The stones on the surface range in size from smaller than marbles to larger than cigarette packets”

SWEET LAMB’S DARK SIDE

So, we have spaceframe construction and motorsport-grade long-travel passive suspension here, up against just about the cleverest and most versatile interlinked active air suspension that a global car manufacturer can come up with. The niche-industry Nomad probably cost less to develop, from clean sheet to finished product, than JLR spent on the Octa’s 6D Dynamics interlinked hydraulic damper system alone. Meanwhile, the Mach-E Rally is, on the face of it, just a £2250 option on an existing performance EV. Some retuned dampers, longer coil springs, white-faced alloy wheels, underbody protection panels and Michelin CrossClimate 2 all-season tyres. How *serious* could that be?

Answers to all those questions and more will follow shortly after the nice man in the pick-up truck opens the gate on the steep, rutted and, in places, adversely cambered gravel playground. The bad news for the Defender, and to an extent the Mach-E, is that it’s fairly narrow, perhaps twice the width of a Nomad as an average but at points an even tighter squeeze.

The surface is sun-baked gravel and dirt, with plumes of drifting dust eddying up from it behind you as you drive, which the spring sunshine hits and beams through like rising flame. It’s a ‘loose’ surface in quite unforgiving terms. The stones across it range in size from smaller than marbles to larger than cigarette packets – and, as stones do, they pile up on the outside of corners, making the grip ebb away just where you need it to come to your aid.

There are, in places, channels, holes and gullies to drop wheels into on the inside of those same corners – and not all of them will help you. There’s a tight hairpin bend with ruts deep enough to throw you offline and a roughly sheep-sized rock to stop you taking a wide line on entry. There are a couple of faster downhill, off-camber bends that will be unforgiving if you’re too quick going in (and, sooner or later in cars like these, you’re sure to be). There are sheer drops looming just beyond the margins of the ‘road’ in places. And there’s a jump. Of course there is.

It’s going to be something of a leveller, this place. Commitment will be needed to get very far into fourth gear even on the quickest stretches, so I’m not sure how much use 626bhp will be to ▸

Even if your sat-nav connection dies, Sweet Lamb is easy to find

Unlike the Nomad, the Octa does all the hard work so you don’t have to

◀ the Land Rover, or even 480bhp to the Ford. Accessible torque should go a long way, though, but only if it's matched by proper gravel traction and stopping power.

CARS OF MANY PARTS

The Defender Octa is the kind of big, heavy car that can take some serious punishment. You arrive in it at a place like Sweet Lamb, with its tracks, fields, streams and climbs in every direction, with not a flicker of unease.

That's partly because your journey has already been so remarkably pleasant. The Octa takes to on-road motorway and A-road miles with very little compromise whatsoever to its rolling refinement associated with its beefed-up running gear – and big-hitting overtaking pace when you need it.

But it's also because this car's sheer rough-stuff capability is exceptional. We've had a dry winter, so it happens that the ford you have to cross to gain access to The Mile Loop is at a low level on the day of our test, and all three cars can cross it easily. But if it had been 18in deeper? The Defender – with its 1000mm wading depth – would simply have had the fun all to itself, and the Nomad might have ended up somewhere a lot farther downstream in the Wye Valley.

Getting to where you want to be in order to enjoy yourself in fairly remote places like this, and carrying with you what you will need when you get there, is a significant part of the equation when assessing how much fun these cars can provide in the broadest of senses. And on all of that stuff, the Defender has a mighty head start when you stop to think about it. Are usability and capability – or, rather, the want of them – significant hurdles for the electric Ford? In some ways, I'd say so – but not all.

The Mach-E GT wasn't the most efficient EV you could spend £70,000 on before Ford jacked up the ride height by 20mm and fitted those all-season tyres to it. As the Rally, it will do a little over 210 miles as a touring electric range, which meant it arrived at our Welsh rallying idyll with about 75% battery capacity showing, with the nearest rapid charger a good 25 miles away.

Focuses the mind, that. I won't be ruining the verdict, however, to tell you that the Mach-E survives a fairly long day's off-road use, with a couple of leadfoots taking plenty of entertainment from it, and leaves at the end with more than enough range remaining to guarantee its onward progression.

As a very basic test of the primary usability of an EV made with this sort of driving in mind, I reckon that's valid: and the Mach-E Rally passes it. But, at all points, we keep a wary eye on that range meter, in a way we simply don't need to with the fossil-fuelled alternatives, and perhaps have just a little less outright fun as a result.

On a more normal day, of course, the Mach-E Rally is still a car you could get all manner of profitable, zero-emissions use ▶

Nomad remains a pure driver's car that makes few concessions to luxury

Huge screen hints at how Mach-E Rallys are likely to be used most of the time

This £164k and 626bhp special still feels like a proper Defender inside

It may have had some outright grip problems, but you wouldn't believe how well the Mach-E's Michelin road tyres stood up to a proper gravel-surface pounding. We had one puncture across the three cars to deal with on the day – and it wasn't on the Ford.

> *"534lb ft per tonne in the Ariel plays 235lb ft in the Defender. You can start to see the enormous difference the Nomad's lightness makes"*

Suspension lift and white wheels mark out rally-themed Mach-E

Octa's 20in rims get Michelin, BF Goodrich or Goodyear rubber

Nomad can thrive off road even without a powered front axle

◂ out of. It's practical but not huge; fast, alternative and interesting to drive but not a six-figure buying prospect. Suited to the school run, supermarket shop, office commute and football practice. It has five doors, five usable seats and Ford-typical real-world appeal baked right in.

Need we point out that the Nomad, er, doesn't? I doubt it, because it's the kind of car you take giant helpings of enjoyment from on the more limited occasions you have to drive it, not the other way around.

The one with the green frame that Ariel brought to Sweet Lamb for us has Perspex side protection to stop the breeze billowing up your trouser legs so much, as well as a canvas roof as rain protection. You expect to finish driving it by removing so much dust from your various facial orifices, but it actually shelters you from all that fairly well. Hit a water splash in it at pace, though, and… you get wet. But generally, it doesn't throw enough dirt into the cockpit to make you wish you had packed ski goggles or to make it a mission to clean up afterwards.

The Nomad may be the kind of car you would only really ever seek to have fun in, but what fun it is. You can have one with a rally-style hydraulic handbrake fitted if you want (as our test car has), in addition to the optional winch, roof-mounted headlights and gorgeous Öhlins TTX suspension – and, trust me, you should.

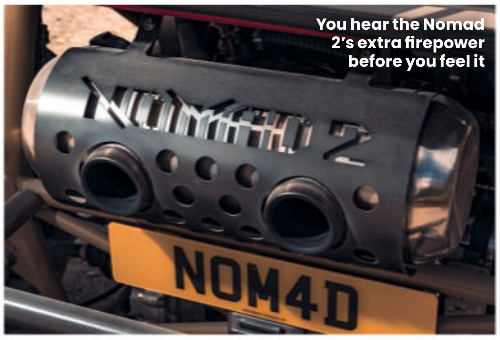
CRUNCH TIME

Onto the gravel we go, then. In descending order, 534lb ft of torque per tonne in the Ariel plays 271lb ft in the Ford and only 235lb ft in the Octa. Even there, you can start to see the enormous difference that the Nomad's lightness makes.

Octa has a wading depth of 1000mm, so bridges are optional

Up the ante and the Mach-E can scrabble a bit on loose surfaces

Is does a passable impression of a Focus RS WRC car



You hear the Nomad 2's extra firepower before you feel it

Goodyear Wranglers are tough old boots, but there's a spare just in case

But the proper all-terrain tyres of the Nomad and Octa will have an impact, too, versus the more road-intended rubber of the Mach-E, while peak torque at revs isn't the same thing as accessible torque right under your big toe, right at the wheel where you need it most.

Is your idea of a fun gravel driving experience something pointy, drifty and responsive, which rotates freely as you turn it in and 'gas it up'? Whose cornering attitude can be adjusted with power as quickly and easily as a flick of your ankle and roll of your wrists? Something that powers away from 50mph corners with a real surge of urgency and a carefree wiggle of its hips? Well, you might be surprised just how well the Mach-E Rally fits the bill. Being electric might actually make it more fun than it would otherwise be here. It's lively and responsive to the controls at speeds that don't make you fear for what's waiting on the other side of the grass verge.

The bigger, more stable, more under-control-feeling Octa isn't quite so lively. That's partly a function of grip and partly of size. It has loads of grip on gravel, its Goodyear Wrangler Duratrac all-terrain tyres chewing through the surface scree and making it ready to pull bigger speeds than the confines of this circuit really allow something of its sheer size. It feels a bit like a monster truck on a Race of Champions stadium circuit.

The Mach-E's all-season Michelins get to about 50mph, by contrast, and then start to skate around on the top layer of stones, their tread blocks failing to clear the rubble they're bombarded with, and allowing the chassis' ▶

◂ naturally more expressive tendencies to start to become a liability. So driving the Ford on gravel is a kind of quick-quick-slow progression; you will have a blast, provided you don't go too fast.

In the tighter bends, there's nothing the Defender's posh active suspension can really do, by comparison, about the more languid chassis responses of a bigger, taller, heavier car, but the Mach-E feels much lower, keener and more willing to be teased into a positive cornering attitude than the Land Rover, which only really wants to tuck its nose in under trail-braking (although it will certainly do it).

Both cars are fun. The Defender is leagues tougher and more capable and would come into its own on a quicker, wider gravel track, I'd wager. But here and now and in a corner of the Powys countryside that seems to suit it peculiarly well, the Ford is actually the more addictive driver's car.

And then you get into the Nomad and it's like you're in another place altogether and engaged in an interactive physical act of a different order of magnitude. The Octa ultimately goes perhaps 10-15% further than a regular Defender for entertainment factor but still trades squarely on its assured feel. It can only make so much room to really entertain you without the risk of bursting that safe, silver-lined bubble. The Mach-E goes further still, but its ultimate lack of grip, ground clearance and damping authority would make you fear for it if tougher, quicker surfaces and tests presented. But the Nomad simply yums it all up, lets you feel every little deflection and work for every correction, and puts itself on a different plane of motoring existence in the process. It is enormous, monumental fun.

It's a test of nerve to begin with, though, and a huge change of tone. Because suddenly every channel, bump, ridge, rock and camber gets right through to your fingertips and backside. The Defender was filtering them out, mostly, although you didn't know it; the Ford only hinting at them. But the Nomad broadcasts them right into your forearms and shoulders. Lots of physical effort is involved in getting on its level and armfuls of corrective lock require plenty of fast dexterity.

But it gives back what you put in and more, with its incredible, oh-so-faithful handling. On 16in wheels and chunkily sidewalled Yokohama all-terrain tyres, it finds plenty of grip and traction on the gravel but still demands a much closer watching brief before you can let all 382lb ft loose through the rear wheels without a bodily reaction.

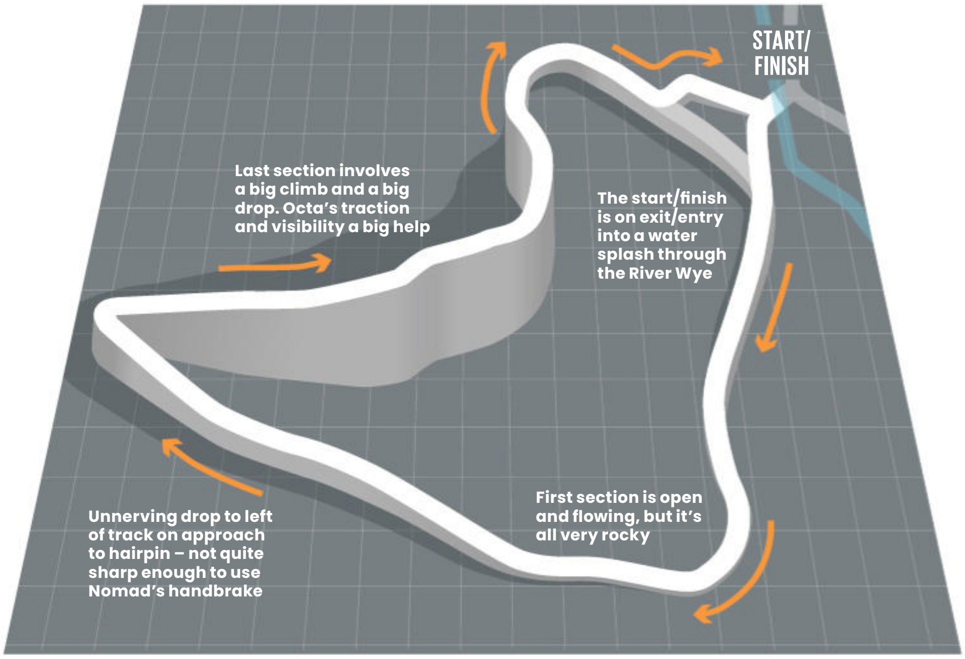
The steering communicates tirelessly, so you know without doubt when you're on a good line and, very clearly, when you're not. Get wide, get lazy, turn in in the wrong gear or fluff your lines with the pedals and you will have plenty to sort out. But drive well and you can take pretty much whatever line and angle through a third-gear, 50mph corner you want to and feel every move the chassis makes.

And the most awe-inspiring move is when it takes to the air. The jump on the Mile Loop isn't a desperately quick one, but it is quite steep and severe. You wouldn't risk what damage the Defender's bulk could do to itself by jumping it there; even less the not-as-well-damped, shorter-travel Mach-E.

But the Nomad takes it like some magic flying La-Z-Boy armchair. It vaults like a gazelle but, thanks to that Öhlins suspension and its modest weight, comes back down to earth in a more comfortable, matter-of-fact way than you would ever believe possible. And so you line it up again, just to check it wasn't a fluke. The same way you do once you've found the perfect line through that tricky off-camber corner. And you don't stop until you're blowing and grinning in gloriously equal measure.

Cars this compelling may not play by the rules, but they're absolutely worth making room, time, occasion and effort for. The Nomad vividly proves that if you really want to have fun off road, committing fully and putting the effort in truly pays off – and it does it in singularly superb fashion.

WHICH IS QUICKEST AROUND A LAP?


START/
FINISH
Last section involves a big climb and a big drop. Octa's traction and visibility a big help
The start/finish is on exit/entry into a water splash through the River Wye
First section is open and flowing, but it's all very rocky
Unnerving drop to left of track on approach to hairpin – not quite sharp enough to use Nomad's handbrake

A look at the respective power-to-weight ratios suggests to me that the Nomad will be the quickest car around here, because while it's the least powerful, it's also the lightest by such a distance that it should easily out-accelerate the other two.

It doesn't quite work out like I thought. The Nomad is the most fun, by a mile, but a few things are in play. Traction is at a real premium, especially uphill, and there are a lot of hills, for the Nomad is rear-drive. If, like me, you're a bit of a wimp and feel overly exposed, confidence plays a part. The Nomad scores a 1min 45.00sec time from start to finish point.

The Mustang has fewer traction issues. For a tallish car, it also feels quite stable, owing to its low centre of gravity. And it seems to stop well. A respectable 1min 47.03sec time is its reward.

What I didn't expect was how isolated and capable the Octa would feel. Its wheel control must be exemplary because the body is so flat. Steering is light and accurate. Braking is great but acceleration is outstanding. And visibility I suspect makes a huge difference. It goes around our course in 1min 40.97sec.

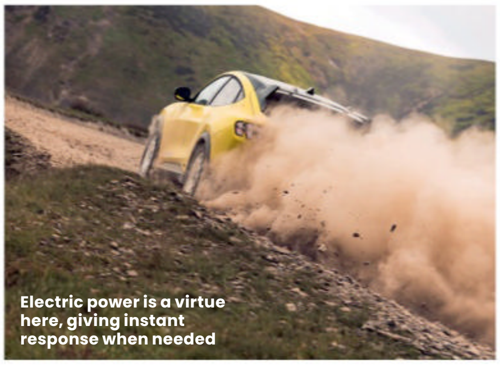
I suspect that, after a cup of sweet tea and some more familiarisation, in the Nomad I could/should/would match the Defender's time, but if you're hopping in, trusting what the car and your reactions tell you, the Octa gives its driver extraordinary confidence and has no little ability. **MP**

2ND A simple, direct and surprisingly effective way to enjoy yourself on gravel, although it lacks some toughness, stamina and true capability.

PETER LIDDIARD

It's far and away the lightest of the bunch and easily the most fun

Entertainment levels are kept in check by its mass and unbreakable traction



Electric power is a virtue here, giving instant response when needed

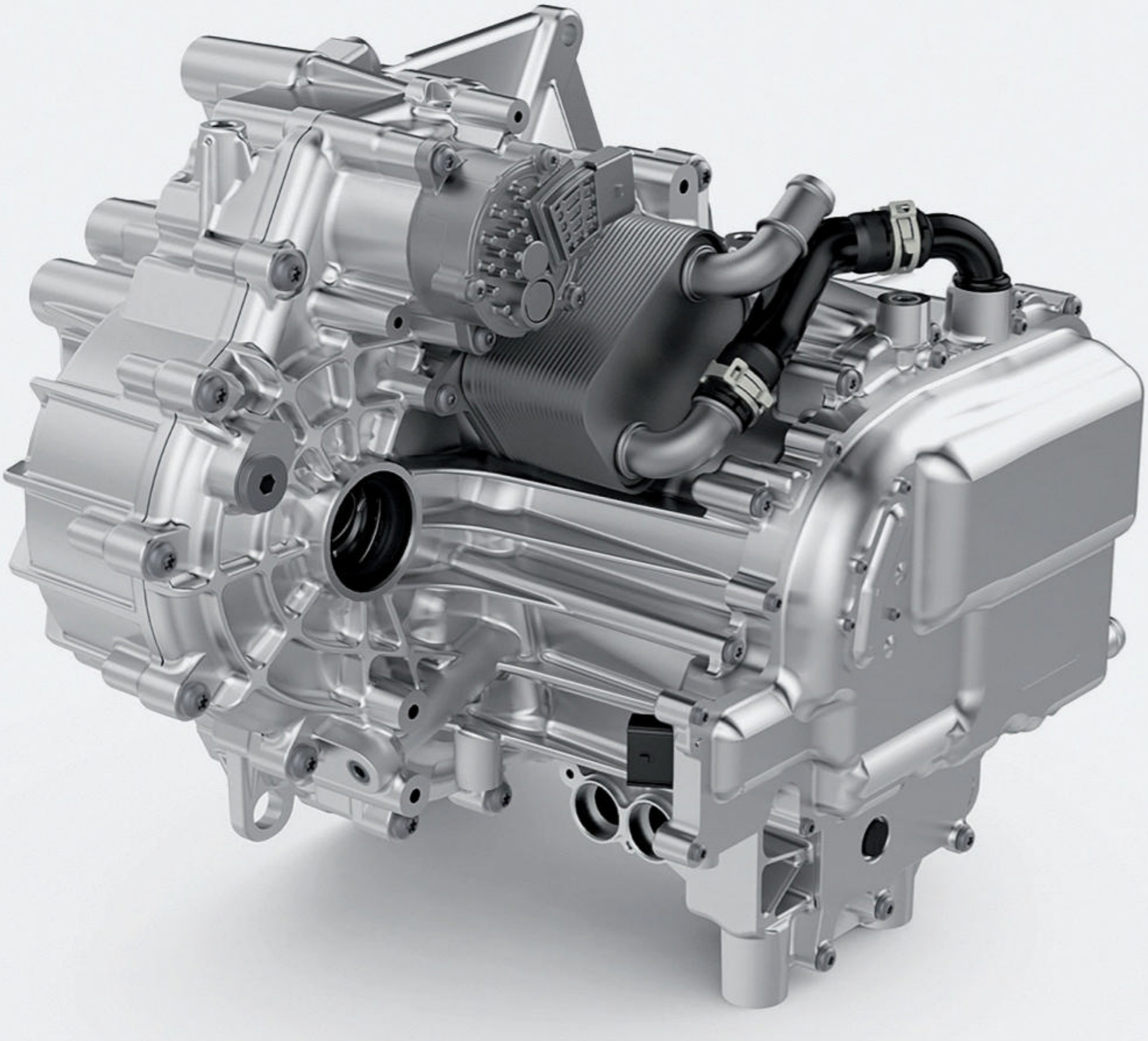
	ARIEL NOMAD 2	FORD MUSTANG MACH-E RALLY	LAND ROVER DEFENDER 110 P635 OCTA EDITION 1
Rating	★★★★½	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Price	£67,992	£76,790	£163,545
Engine	4 cyls in line, 2267cc, turbocharged, petrol	Two permanent magnet synchronous motors	V8, 4395cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus 48V ISG
Power	305bhp at 5950rpm	480bhp	626bhp at 5855-7000rpm
Torque	382lb ft at 2850rpm	634lb ft	590lb ft at 1800-6000rpm (with launch control)
Gearbox	6-spd manual, RWD	1-spd reduction gear, 4WD	8-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight	715kg	2343kg	2510kg
0-62mph	3.4sec	3.6sec	4.6sec
Top speed	134mph	124mph	155mph
Battery	na	99.0/91.0kWh (total/usable)	na
Economy	35mpg (est)	2.9mpkWh	21.0mpg
Electric range	na	316 miles	na
CO_2, tax band	na	0g/km, 3%	304g/km, 37%

3RD Would get you to almost anywhere there is fun to be had and with plenty of entertaining flourish. Needs a big canvas to really impress as a driver's car, though.

1ST Has neither usability nor capability to worry about and feels superbly, vividly liberated as a result. Fun on the loose like just about nothing else.

RANGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Can range-extender tech finally deliver on its early promise? **STEPHEN DOBIE** finds out from the experts



Let's wind back to 2012: Britain is gripped by Olympic fever as Vauxhall launches the Ampera and the UK's first 'plug-in' hybrid decisively beats the Volkswagen Up to European Car of the Year glory in the process. Within 12 months the Ampera will have a carbonfibre-cored rival in the unlikely shape of the BMW i3, another car using its petrol engine purely as a range-extender in what appears to be a movement gathering momentum.

Yet more than a decade later both cars feel like distant memories and range-extender (REx) technology – essentially where an engine charges a drive battery instead of powering the car itself – remains remarkably niche. Mazda will sell you its MX-30 crossover with a dinky rotary generator on board, while LEVC London cabs deploy REx tech on a larger scale. But most customers opt for a battery-electric vehicle (BEV) or parallel hybrid and ignore a once-pioneering stepping stone between the two camps.

ZF reckons that is about to change. The German automotive and industrial tech giant has its hand in all manner of components and its 8HP eight-speed automatic transmission is a mainstay of the industry, with dozens of applications since its late-noughties introduction. ZF's latest range-extender systems, eRE and eRE+, are designed to speed up car makers' evolution of hybrid and EV technology – and help them mould around increasingly tumultuous market conditions.

"It could potentially revitalise the somewhat sluggish electric vehicle market in Europe and the US," says the company. "Major manufacturers like Hyundai, Ford and Stellantis are showing interest in range-extender technology and planning to launch vehicles equipped with it within the next two years." Its halo gearbox certainly has a good track record of breaking down rivalries and supplying multiple, competing manufacturers all at once.

So what's new compared with a decade ago? "When you look at the history of range-extenders, [engines] like those in the i3 were designed to help you in utmost urgency," says ZF's e-mobility R&D boss Otmar Scharrer. "This has changed. Range-extenders are now much stronger and more powerful." Cooling, packaging and refinement have improved as REx cars move away from shrunken engines to proven larger units with a strong, efficient mid-range and capable of running frequently rather than being dipped into sparingly. A naturally aspirated petrol four-pot is optimal.

While neither of ZF's new offerings drives the wheels directly – it's key to their MO – they can work with up to 200bhp of engine output and either plug and play with a manufacturer's existing engine and motor or use a clutch and differential to create a more flexible set-up where an intermediary generator can drive the wheels. Both options can hook up to 400V or 800V charging architecture.

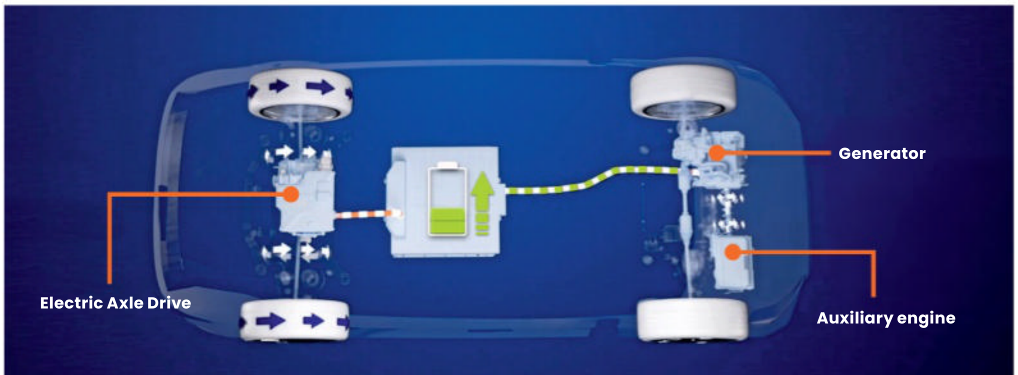
Scharrer sees huge market potential in areas where charging infrastructure remains a barrier to EV sales success. "I hear comments that this is a very short-term technology and that regulations aren't following," he laments. "But if you have a car capable of going 155 miles fully electric, then it has a range-extender for the countryside, why should you be banned from driving it in the city?

"We involve ourselves as much as we can in regulatory discussions. In China, to keep the status of a 'new-energy vehicle' [EVs and plug-in hybrids], you must not connect the internal combustion engine to the wheels. The EU has not finally decided what to do with range-extenders, but I think they realise that this is an interesting opportunity to offer a product which is less dependent on rare materials and cell chemistry because you need a significantly smaller battery.

"They want to understand what the pros and cons are. The whole mobility community is ready for these discussions, because we need them. The past regulation of BEVs has shown that we cannot push things into the market against the customers' will. The easier a solution is, the higher its chance of surviving a long time. And this is quite an easy solution. I personally expect that we will see it beyond the next five to 10 years. I think there will be plenty of applications which really excite people."

Confident words when sales of new hybrids are due to cease in Europe after 2035. Indeed, Ineos, Lotus and Volkswagen are three more names reportedly dabbling with REx powertrains as we speak. Maybe the Ampera was right all along...

ZF's Scharrer sees a future for REx, but regulators need to see the benefits too



In a typical REx powertrain, the battery of an electrically propelled car is charged by a fuel-based engine, ergo its range is extended. It's a series-hybrid drivetrain where the ICE element never directly connects to the axles. ZF's eRE and eRE+ REx products, depicted above, are due to arrive in 2026.

BARGAIN BUYS: REx MARKS THE SPOT

Vauxhall Ampera (2012-2015)

£2500-£9000

Pioneers come little cheaper than this. Government grants nipped it under £30k new, but its compromised four-seat cabin dented appeal, and even COTY honours couldn't help it breach the mainstream. The entry point is now £2.5k for high-milers; double that for a car under 80k miles and with a dealer warranty. The best top £8k, and there's a decent handful to choose from – unlike its vanishingly rare Chevy Volt twin.

BMW i3 REx (2013-2018)

£5000-£15,000

All-electric i3s outnumber range-extenders on the used market, but production of the latter ended some years earlier, so it's the better used bargain. Prices start from £5k for an example with 100k-plus miles; £7k is the entry point for average miles; £12k gets you one of a tiny handful of pokier, sharper-handling i3s REx hot hatches that were built before the model was retired. A rare beast.

LEVC VN5 (2020-)

£9000-£14,000

A brand-new LEVC taxi will set you back £60k, while its commercial equivalent is £54k before options. Yet examples a few years old and still within warranty can command just one-fifth of that, starting at £9k (before VAT) with 25,000 miles on the clock. The VN5's 830kg payload and 5.5-cubic-metre capacity can swallow two Euro pallets, and there's a keen online following. Of course, the cheapest way into an LEVC is to simply hail one down...

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

“It does almost everything so effortlessly”

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 11,984**

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

After 11k miles, has our five-star car also become a long-term legend?

WHY WE RAN IT To see whether this new big estate really is a flawless family hauler

The Superb had been away from me for a while, getting passed around the team for all to experience its brilliance. It did a long stint with photographer Jack Harrison, munching some serious miles driving all around the country at an average of 54.7mpg (that's a brim-to-brim calculation, although the digital readout is dead accurate). He managed to get 868 miles out of a tank on one occasion, which is brave on his part and impressive on the car's. He reports that there's very little about it that he doesn't like, it swallows his gear with ease and it's great for doing car-to-car photography, because the boot is big and the ride is soft.

It's also worth mentioning that everyone, short or tall, seems to get on with the seats.

Anyway, I needed it back recently so I could drive to Belgium to see my parents and pick up a big mirror, some artwork and other odds and ends. Not exactly a challenge for the Superb, but somehow it turned out to be slightly fraught.

When I picked up the car from our office, I immediately thought: “Am I going mad, or is the ride significantly worse and the engine noisier than I remember?” It occurred to me that I had better check the tyre pressures and engine oil when I got home.

Indeed, someone had set the pressures to 3.0 bar all round when they're supposed to be 2.5 bar and the oil was down at the bottom of the dipstick (it has an actual dipstick – praise be!). Good news for my sanity and legitimacy as a car tester, less so for the car.

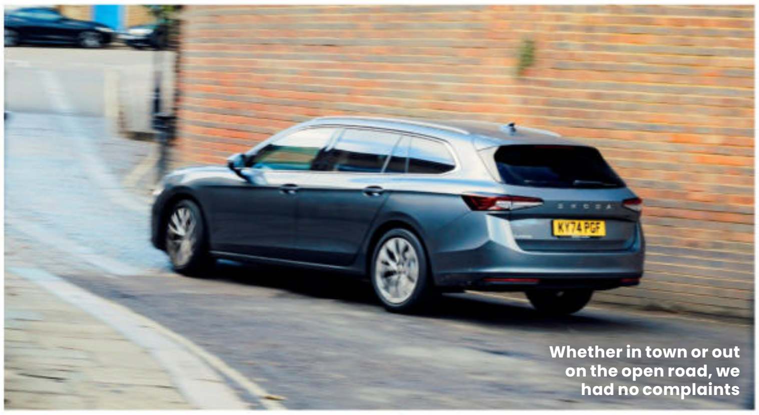
I decided to leave the pressures for a while to see if this would make a difference to the fuel economy, but topping up the oil was more urgent – and surprisingly difficult. A sticker in the engine bay informs you that it wants Volkswagen-approved 0W-20 oil but, even though this EA288 2.0-litre diesel engine is a very common unit, such oil doesn't appear to exist.

Always check pressures before a trip

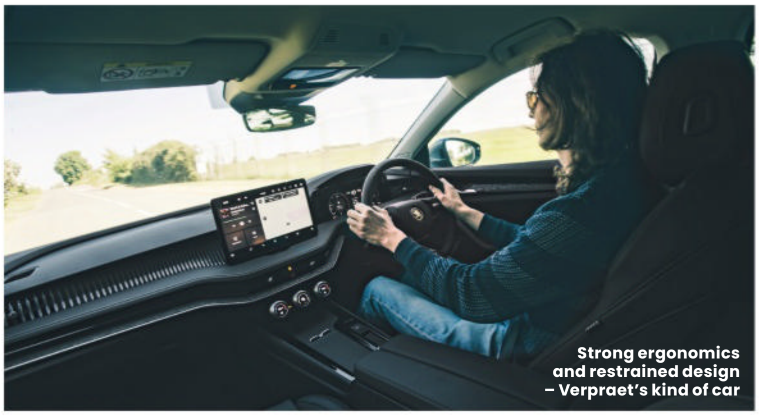
SECOND OPINION

No car has ever made me feel like I'm driving less than this Superb. A pillow-soft ride paired with truly outstanding seats took the exhaustion out of driving, and looking at the range readout after a 300-mile trip and seeing that I still had 500 miles of diesel left really gave me the feeling that I could drive on forever. I wish the steering were a bit weightier on the motorway and the stereo were better, but I'd change nothing else. **JH**

First I tried a big petrol station – nothing. Then I called in to a VW and Skoda dealer on my way to the Eurotunnel – “sorry, we're out”. At this point, I was running late for my train, so I pressed on. By the time



Whether in town or out on the open road, we had no complaints



Strong ergonomics and restrained design – Verpraet's kind of car

Enormous boot suited luggage, furniture and photographers alike

I got there, a warning came on the screen that I should top up the oil. I then tried the first fuel station out of Calais. Again, every type of oil under the sun bar this one. At this point, I gave up and bought a bottle of VW-spec 0W-30, since I reckoned it was close enough and better than carrying on with insufficient oil.

In the manual, it says that the engine may consume up to 0.5 litres per 600 miles and a bit more in the first 3000 miles. That's fair enough, but you would expect it to come with a top-up bottle in the boot, especially when the oil you need can be hard to find.

I also note that its first service is due at two years or 20,000 miles, which seems awfully long to me. It's been shown time and again that these long intervals are just a way to reduce the running costs for fleet managers and people who keep a car only a few years. If you intend to keep it longer, you would be wise to do it at least every year instead and cut the mileage interval in half.

I arrived in Belgium with no further incident and with the trip computer showing 62.6mpg.

For the way back, I returned the tyre pressures to the correct 2.5 bar, which made no difference to the fuel consumption that I could make out but did take the sting out of the ride.

And so our time with the Superb comes to an end. In my job as a road tester, test cars come and go all the time. With most of them, I'm glad to have had the experience and don't look back, but with this one I'm sad that it's departing. It's not the most exciting thing in the world, but it is just so good, so useful, so complete. It does almost everything so effortlessly.

Of course there were a few minor niggles. Towards the end, it developed a glitch where the volume control would stop working if you switched between Apple CarPlay and the native software a few times. Switching to the radio and back to CarPlay would reset it. I don't love how you have to twist the gear selector and I wish the car had standard cruise control and a more intelligent auto hold system. But that's all extremely minor stuff. Overall it has been brilliant.

I won't repeat the five-star road test verdict here, because it still applies, but in short, it's not just that this car is big, practical and fuel efficient, it's that it also feels luxurious inside, rides well, has a minimal number of annoyances and, when you point it at a corner, actually handles well too.

When a major car maker stops for a moment trying to be desperately trendy with too many flashing lights, cartoon characters dancing across enormous screens and 'sporty' suspension for the sake of it, it sometimes results in a really good, fit-for-purpose car. The Superb is that car.

ILLYA VERPRAET

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TEST DATA

SKODA SUPERB 2.0 TDI ESTATE SE L

MILEAGE

At start 816
At end 11,984

PRICES

List price new £39,705
List price now £40,795
Price as tested £41,675

OPTIONS

Electric towbar £1105, Graphite Grey paint £680, spacesaver spare wheel £185

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 55.6mpg
Fuel tank 66 litres
Test average 55.3mpg
Test best 60.6mpg
Test worst 51.1mpg
Real-world range 803 miles

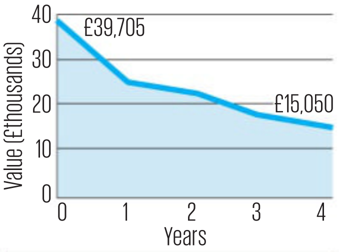
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 9.3sec
Top speed 137mph
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1968cc, turbocharged, diesel
Max power 148bhp at 3000-4200rpm
Max torque 266lb ft at 1600-2750rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch auto, FWD
Boot 690 litres
Wheels 8.0Jx18in, alloy
Tyres 235/45 R18 94W, Bridgestone Turanza T005
Kerb weight 1678kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £485 pcm
CO2 135g/km
Service costs Oil top-up £26
Other costs None
Fuel costs £1358.58
Running costs including fuel £1384.58
Cost per mile 12 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

15 Jan, 29 Jan, 12 Feb, 19 Feb, 5 Mar, 12 Mar, 9 Apr, 7 May, 28 May

LOVE IT

HELPFUL DIMENSIONS
The Superb is long but not that wide, so it's huge inside but easy enough to thread through tight gaps – or a Eurotunnel carriage.

0
mph
Since refuelling
868 mi
21:15 h
59.6 mpg

AN 800-MILE RANGE
It averaged 55.3mpg with us, but you don't need to hypermile to get more than 60mpg out of that diesel engine.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE
No plugging in, no electricity costs, no electrification: just an efficient powertrain in an aerodynamic body.

STRESS-FREE MOTORING
Most modern cars are annoying but almost everything in this one worked well and the mandatory ADAS were easy to disable.

LOATHE IT

POOR CHOICES
This particular spec was pretty rubbish: grey over black leather, with no heated steering wheel or upgraded stereo.

RENAULT SCENIC

Never mind our electric Renault: what do you think of yours?

MILEAGE 5912
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if the 2024 Car of the Year really is the standout family SUV

"It's great, but…" seems to be a prevailing theme of my time in the Renault Scenic. It does so much so well, and then, just at the point of us reaching a blissful equilibrium together, something happens just to set it back a bit.

In this warmer weather I've been winding down the window a lot, as you do. Yet when the driver's window goes down and settles – or rather doesn't – it then spends the next few seconds making a rattle in the bowels of the door. It goes away soon enough, but it's irritating.

More software bugs have materialised, too. The Apple CarPlay issues reported previously haven't got any better, and now the traffic sign recognition system has gone permanently blank. In some ways that's actually a blessing, because it isn't the most accurate operator when supposedly in full working order. And another thing… the memory function of the seats has a very selective memory.

Yet I still like so much about this car. The light fabric trim is great at keeping the seats cool in the sunny weather, and it looks so much better than any leather could. The range has turbocharged itself now, too: I'm getting close to 340 miles on a full charge on mixed roads – a good 100 miles or so more than in the depths of winter.

Seats look cool and feel it, thanks to the light fabrics

Warmer weather has boosted the Scenic's range to 340 miles

"It's great, but…" is how a lot of your correspondence on this car has gone. Reader John Warlow reported CarPlay connectivity issues, a problem with the reversing camera and issues with the driver display freezing when displaying the navigation.

"Yet even with all these issues we love the car," says John. He likes the range in particular, and says he will definitely be considering another one when the lease expires.

David Ellis also offered an excellent summary of his Scenic, although this time with fewer 'buts' than John and myself. His is in white with a black roof: it's a combination I have yet to see, but it does sound like a good one.

LOVE IT

ROOM IN THE BACK

Had some passengers in the back seat for the first time recently. Rear leg room scored highly, helped by the flat floor.

LOATHE IT

DIRTY LOOK

I've said it before, but why is this car so hard to keep clean? Insects, birds, trees: they all take a shine to it and leave their mark.

David says he's now "officially a convert" to EVs from diesel; 8p per kWh overnight charging will do that to you with mileages like David's on journeys rarely longer than 120 miles or so. He's a big fan of pre-conditioning – an electric car boon that makes de-icing redundant – and has adapted his driving style to allow for the extra weight of an EV.

His niggle list is less problems, more suggested improvements: an illuminated charging port and interior door handles to help at night, the adoption of steering wheel buttons for the stereo rather than the archaic steering wheel column-mounted controller and better stability for the My Renault app to control some of the car's features remotely. I'm with David on the last point in particular.

Ian Briscoe wrote to say he was mostly enjoying his Scenic so far, but he asked me this: "In your normal seating position can you easily see the right-hand indicator light on the instrument panel?" Ian couldn't, and for the first time he left an indicator on after overtaking. He's right, too.

The "it's great, but…" line could be applied to so many of the Scenic's rivals. Every brand now has an electric hatchback that's raised up slightly to allow for a battery pack of around 80kWh, and which is about four and a half metres long and has a range in excess of 300 miles.

They all do some things well and others not so well. This was obvious recently when I tried a Skoda Elroq as part of an early test for 2026 Car of the Year shortlisting (the Scenic, of course, won that crown in 2024). The Elroq was better to drive than the Scenic. Its drivetrain was smoother and more responsive, the handling balance better and refinement comfortably ahead of the Scenic. It's great, but… it was a bit dull in other places. The interior lacks soul or inspiration – things the Scenic has in spades.

The drivetrain of the Skoda with the styling inside and out of the Scenic would be a real winner. As it stands, the choice is yours to make.

MARK TISSHAW

TEST DATA

RENAULT SCENIC ICONIC LONG RANGE

Price new £45,495 **Price as tested** £46,745 **Faults** Apple CarPlay and other software glitches **Expenses** None (service carried out by Renault HQ) **Range** 340 miles **Economy** 3.9mpkWh **Last seen** 28.5.25

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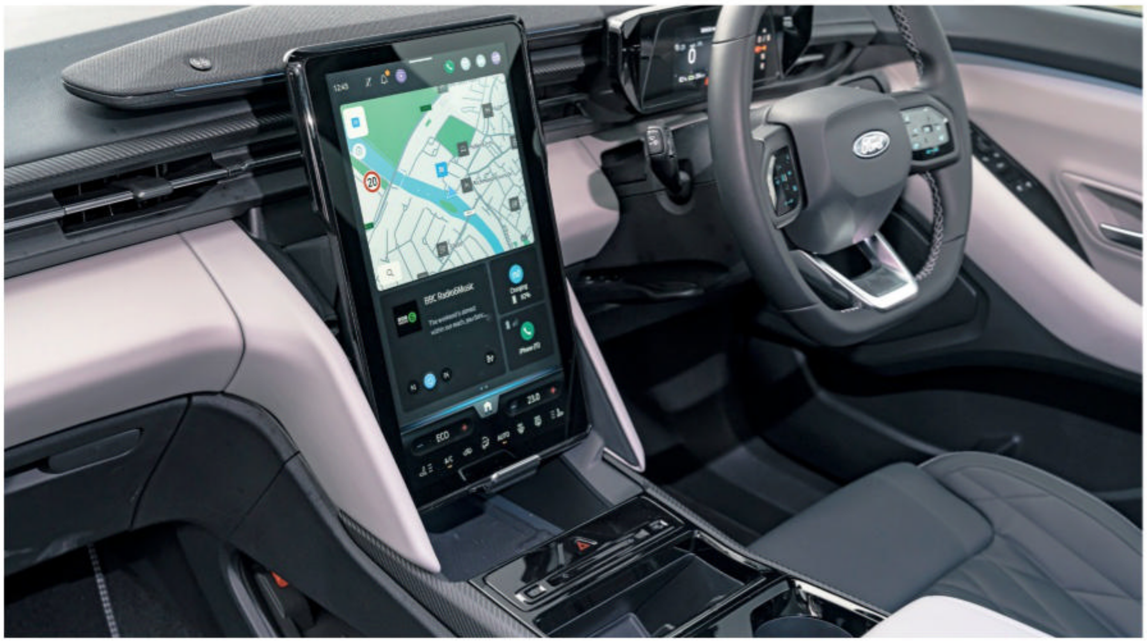
STARGATE S6
HY24 CTX



FORD EXPLORER

Our electric SUV's touchscreen takes centre stage

MILEAGE 3681
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Is Ford's first European-built EV, with its VW underpinnings, really a true Ford?

Friends and family have been experiencing the Explorer's many charms

The Ford's touchscreen is a talking point, and one that's been commented on by all my friends and family who have had the privilege of being offered a ride. And that's no surprise: the 14.6in vertical screen dominates the dash.

It's got a neat party trick, too: you can slide it up, both to set it at an angle of your choosing and to access a sort-of-secret storage cubby. I tend to have it down: it makes the screen easier to reach and means I can better see the B&O soundbar. My ears aren't attuned enough to know if having the soundbar blocked by a bit of the touchscreen affects the audio quality, but that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it.

Touchscreens in cars remain a contentious issue, but there are now too many controls and functions not to use them, so the focus is on ensuring they're implemented as well as possible. That includes placement: should a screen be portrait or landscape? (We're excluding Mini's round screens, those crazy oddballs.) Initially I was part of Team Landscape, because they look better and more natural on horizontally aligned car dashboards – and it matches the way my TV sits. But the more I experience vertically mounted screens the more I'm convinced. Last year I ran a Honda e:Ny1 that had a supersize portrait screen, and I really warmed to it (the screen, that is; the rest of the car was 'meh'). The Explorer confirms my feelings.

They may sit oddly on the dash, but vertical screens just work better in a car. The top is near your eyeline, and it's much easier to glance down at a vertical screen than one that's landscape. Easier to reach, too: I have had to reach across big horizontal screens to access functions in the far corner, which isn't ideal when driving.

The Explorer's Sync infotainment system divides the screen into a number of sections, including some fixed elements that remain in place. They're still not as easy to locate as physical buttons, but you do develop the muscle memory that makes it easier to reach them.

The top includes key driving and car control functions, including the drive mode selector – which is useful, because I always need to access it when I get in so I can select Eco. The HVAC controls are all at the bottom of the screen and well placed to access at a glance.

That leaves the middle for key functions such as the sat-nav, entertainment and other bits. It's also where Apple CarPlay appears – although somewhat to the chagrin of my phone, because the Explorer's wireless charger refuses to fill my iPhone's battery as fast as wireless CarPlay drains it.

Both Google Maps and Ford's own sat-nav work well in portrait mode, giving a better view of what's ahead than a landscape screen. It's much easier to scroll through a list of podcasts or songs, too.

Ford clearly thinks the landscape screen is a selling point: it's one aspect of the VW-platformed Explorer that was kept in-house. I'm minded to agree. I'm fast becoming a member of the Portrait Society.
JAMES ATTWOOD

LOVE IT

WARM FUZZY FEELING

Brighter days are definitely boosting the Explorer's economy – perhaps more than I'd expect for a car with a heat pump.

LOATHE IT

WIRELESS WOES

The wireless charging pad seems intermittent at best. It superheats my phone but doesn't put much charge in.

TEST DATA

FORD EXPLORER EXTENDED RANGE PREMIUM RWD

Price new £49,975 **Price as tested** £53,125 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 277 miles **Economy** 3.6mpkWh **Last seen** 28.5.25

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james.attwood@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS

CUPRA LEON

Mileage 8102 **Last seen** 4.6.25

The Leon's wraparound rear light bar has started to delaminate in the middle. It's subtle but disappointingly noticeable – and not what you expect on a year-old car. I've found posts from owners of similarly afflicted cars (including the Formentor SUV) on the forums, and it seems to be a known fault that Cupra will fix under warranty. **FP**

MINI ACEMAN

Mileage 1480 **Last seen** 4.6.25

Did you know that Mini makes you pull the little latch in the footwell twice to open the bonnet? Once to unhitch it, then a second time to actually open it. I sure as heck didn't realise. How did I work it out? Yep, by pulling it once, faffing around for five minutes trying to find the release pull under the bonnet and then finally Googling it. Still, the screenwash bottle is at least nice and easy to find once you get the damn bonnet open. What's that you say? RTFM? **MSc**

DACIA DUSTER

Mileage 1045 **Last seen** 28.5.25

I like sensible design in a car, and the Duster is full of it. But the most pragmatic touch so far (and yes, it is a tad boring) is the cupholders, which are staggered so two same-size cups can sit alongside each other but still be accessed without any spill-inducing awkwardness. **WR**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A
VOLKSWAGEN T-ROC

THIS WILL ROC YOUR WORLD

The T-Roc is the slick, do-it-all answer to the mid-size crossover question

When someone says they want a reliable, practical, good-looking and affordable set of wheels, the default recommendation is so often a Volkswagen Golf. But for those buyers who want a raised ride height and improved visibility (as so many do), then just nudge them towards the Golf of SUVs: the T-Roc.

VW's mid-sized crossover – soon to enter its second generation – is a no-nonsense crowd-pleaser, not least for its distinctive design and flexible, punchy engines, allied to a smartly tuned chassis that is both comfortable and agile.

The T-Roc was launched in 2017 with a price topping £30,000, but today you can find one for £7000 – which seems a steal for a well-equipped and well-rounded family car that will still feel up to date, irrespective of its age.

The T-Roc is underpinned by the same MQB platform as plenty of other VW Group SUVs, but is sized and shaped for a more compact, sportier look that makes it less obviously a crossover.

Its slightly low-slung stance suggests it was built with dynamism in mind, and sure enough it doesn't disappoint. The T-Roc's responsive and accurate steering inspires plenty of confidence, yet this agility isn't tarnished by an unsettled ride. On the contrary, the T-Roc is comfortable and irons out bumps well. If you can find one, opt for a car fitted with the Dynamic Chassis Control package, which lets you configure the chassis depending on your mood. Stick it in Sport and the T-Roc is even more crisp and

Cabin has a premium feel; SEL trim gets two smart digital displays

What we said then

24 JANUARY 2018

"The T-Roc is one of countless compact crossovers introduced over the past six months, but it stands well clear of most. You'll have your own view on the stylishness and desirability, but the T-Roc seems a very clever visual concoction of likeable compactness, coupé-like rakishness, SUV-like robustness and typical VW-brand smartness. The T-Roc offers a rare degree of perky performance and polished ride and handling in this niche. So, class champion or not, the T-Roc is our kind of crossover."

incisive to drive; select Comfort and it's supple and pliant enough for hassle-free mile-munching.

The engine you choose to power your T-Roc will determine the amount of fun you can have. If it's B-road thrills you're after, then seek out the 187bhp 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbocharged petrol. It's a thirsty lump that will do well to return more than 30mpg, but it's smooth and quiet, and it delivers plenty of muscle. If the warm-hatch vibe isn't for you, the 148bhp 1.5-litre petrol four-pot will serve you well. You'll pay around £12k-£14k for a tidy example with roughly 60,000 miles, but that's decent value for a fashionable crossover that will do 40-45mpg day to day. We would avoid the 1.0-litre three-cylinder petrol and 1.6-litre diesel as they're pretty staid. But if it is an oil-burner you're after, the 148bhp 2.0-litre TDI delivers plenty of grunt, and you'll easily manage north of 50mpg in the real world.

The T-Roc's fashionable silhouette is matched by a ritzy and upmarket ambience inside. Some elements on the dashboard and down by your knees feel a bit cheap to the touch, but aside from that it's refined, robust and technologically slick. Specification-wise, aim for at least SEL trim, which comes with the intuitive 8.0in touchscreen infotainment display and super-crisp 10.3in digital instrument cluster.

Pleasingly, the T-Roc performs just as well as the Golf on the practicality front, and while it's not as roomy as the related Seat Ateca, there's enough space in the back for average-size adults – and even if you opt for a panoramic roof, it doesn't encroach on head room.

Most importantly, the T-Roc is a crossover that not only looks good but also makes you feel good when you drive it, and it proves that style-conscious SUVs don't cost the earth.

SAM PHILLIPS

The T-Roc is a tidy handler, but not at the expense of comfort

"If it's B-road thrills you're after, seek out the 187bhp 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbocharged petrol"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

CHRISTIAN SZTAN

"I ordered my car in June 2022 and received it in March 2023. It was my first new car ever. Why did I choose this particular model? I love the T-Roc's higher ride height, especially in my country where the roads are almost non-existent. That's how bad the situation is in Hungary. The 1.5 TSI was a good choice, and I ordered it with the DSG automatic. I've put more than 25,000 miles on the car and not had any major mechanical problems so far."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

Check for the 1.5 petrol being a little hesitant when you pull away when the engine is cold. 'Kangarooing' (fluctuating revs) is a common issue, but it can be resolved with a software update.

The 2.0 TSI uses a timing chain, rather than a belt, which should last the life of the car, while the 1.0, 1.5 and diesel models use more conventional belts. Be sure to check their condition: they're labour-intensive replacements.

■ HANDBRAKE

Make sure that when you pull away, the parking brake automatically releases without any issues. The handbrake can stick on when it fails to detect the clutch biting point. A software fix from VW should solve the issue.

■ BRAKES

Uneven braking or groaning noises when stopping are common. Worn discs and pads are the main culprit, but faulty calipers can also cause it.

■ GEARBOX

Run the engine up through the gears when testing a DSG dual-clutch automatic, and feel for any juddering between shifts. Fresh oil will often solve the issue.

Some cars use a dry clutch, which tends to wear faster than versions fitted with the more reliable wet clutch.

■ INTERIOR

Check for leaks in the boot and footwells. Rain can also leak through the headliner and into the cabin via the rear-view mirror. Inspect the headliner for telltale water stains.

■ BODY

Water can get into the actuator in the fuel filler cap to prevent it from unlocking. Make sure it opens and closes properly.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

The all-wheel-drive 4Motion powertrain is handy to have in winter or for towing, but two-wheel-drive T-Rocs are cheaper.

If you want full-fat performance, the 296bhp T-Roc R gets from 0-62mph in just 4.8sec and handles well for crossover. Sun-seekers will be drawn to the convertible T-Roc – the last of the drop-top crossovers – which starts from around £17,000. There aren't that many around, though.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£7000-£15,999

Broad mix of engines and trims, mostly SE and SEL, and 1.5-litre petrols dominate.

£16,000-£24,999

Clean, low-mile cars. Petrols in strong supply, as are facelifted Style and Life models. Some Convertibles, too.

£25,000-£34,999

Low-mileage, dealer-only cars. Facelifted examples are plentiful, as are hot, R-badged cars.

£35,000 AND ABOVE

Nearly new examples with delivery miles.

ONE WE FOUND

VOLKSWAGEN T-ROC 2.0 TSI SEL DSG 4MOTION, 2018, 38,000 MILES, £16,995

This SEL T-Roc has an upgraded infotainment system and digital instrument cluster, as well as a low mileage and a full service history. It's loaded with decent kit, too, including an electric tailgate and heated seats, and it's a four-wheel-drive model. The 187bhp 2.0-litre engine may be on the thirsty side, but it makes the T-Roc that bit sweeter to drive.

My car & I

The Yaris that's as thrilling as a 911

Pity Callam Burchell. When the 30-year-old steps out of his house each morning, he has to decide which car to drive: his 2012 Porsche 911 Carrera PDK or his 2020 Toyota GR Yaris (there is a third, a Toyota C-HR, but we will ignore that). "It's a tough decision but a nice one," he counters.

He has decided to take the Yaris to his local car meet this evening but inevitably, on the way here, has been comparing the two: "Being rear-wheel drive, obviously the 911 puts its power down very differently from the four-wheel-drive Yaris. It's quick and incredibly agile but is so planted that, no matter how hard I try, I can never unstick it. But the Yaris feels very secure too. The grip and the handling are unbelievable. But that 1.6-litre engine, it makes so much power: 258bhp! The press loved the GR and now I see why."

Callam is from a Toyota-loving family. His dad has owned many Toyotas and Callam was with him when he went to their local dealer to try a C-HR. "That's when I saw the Yaris," he recalls. "It had just come in as a part-exchange against, believe it or not, a new Prius. I took it for a test drive and loved it but on the way home wondered whether I could justify having three cars. I could get rid of my C-HR, I thought,

Our cars

It was worse than I thought. Much worse...

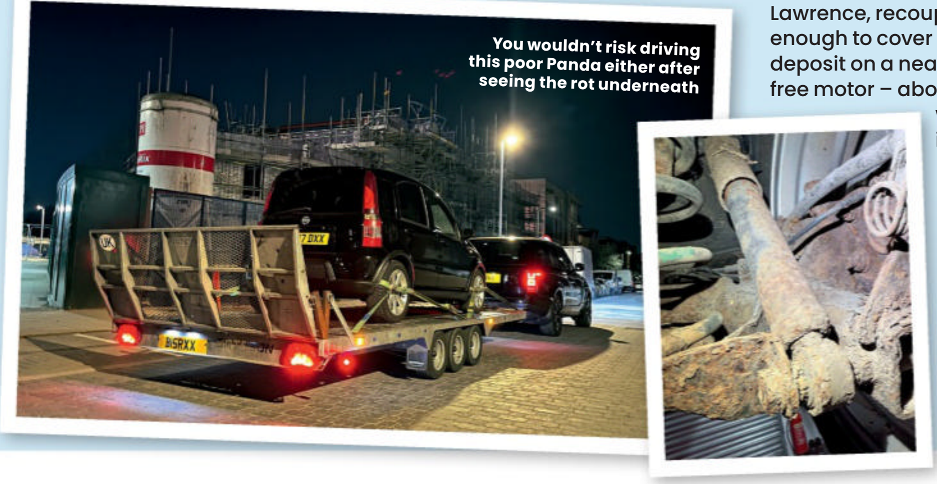
BY CHARLIE MARTIN

It was all excitement in Pandaland: a new timing belt, a service and a thorough inspection from Fettle & Finesse, the UK's leading 100HP specialist.

But all went south rather quickly. I mentioned that I was worried about the condition of the sills – a common issue on 100HPs, hidden away under the chunky bodykit. Then Lawrence, F&F's chief Panda whisperer, managed to pull away an entire chunk just by hand.

Still, I didn't think it would be quite so bad: the final report totalled three pages of A4. The sills, the rear axle, the front subframe, the exhaust backbox, the springs, the dampers and the passenger-side wheel arch were all rotten. And the rear bump stops had fallen off. And there was a coolant leak. And so on…

The bill was just under £2000 to get the imminent MOT failure items sorted, but if I wanted a more complete restoration, it would have tripled.



You wouldn't risk driving this poor Panda either after seeing the rot underneath

I almost went through with it, but I just couldn't justify pumping so much money into a car that I had already considered moving on. So I struck a deal with Lawrence, recouping just about enough to cover the finance deposit on a nearly new, rust-free motor – about which you will hear more in due course.

In the meantime, the F&F crew has completely recommissioned my hot Fiat for someone else to enjoy. It's absolutely stunning.

GR has 258bhp and very little in common with the regular Yaris under the skin

To look inside, there's not much suggestion of the excitement to come

> “The press loved the GR and now I can see why”

but, despite working from home, I'd still managed to put miles on it and the 911. For example, I've put 9000 on the Porsche in the past year and about the same on the C-HR. Have cars, will drive them! So I decided to keep them and buy the Yaris as well.”

Callam paid £27,000 for it six months ago, which, considering it was only £30,000 when new, I reckon sounds a bit stiff – but he's unfazed: “Gen-one GRs hold their value well and, with the latest 2025-spec version starting at £44,000, will continue to, so I have no worries about paying what I did for mine.”

Callam's Yaris is a sporty and purposeful-looking car but already beginning to betray its five years in a way that perhaps a Volkswagen Golf R wouldn't. For example, the thinly painted bonnet hinge bolts are already rusting. Elsewhere, but for the “very comfortable” front bucket seats, some red stitching, a GR badge and alloy pedals, the grey, plasticky interior, lifted straight from the regular Yaris, looks dull and dated.

Not that I share any of these views with Callam, who sees only a five-star, rally-bred hot hatch. In any case, as he reminds me, each time he has it serviced by a Toyota dealer, its warranty extends by a year to a maximum of 10 years or 100,000 miles, so that's five years of worry-free motoring in the bag.

I ask him what big drives he has planned for it. “I'm doing the North Coast 500 this year,” he answers. “It will be in its element, although getting there may be a bit of a trial. It's quite noisy on the motorway and on country roads you feel every bump.”

At a steady cruise, he says, the Yaris returns around 30mpg. Surprisingly, that's worse than his 911, which on a run to the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart last summer managed 35mpg. Somehow, when he decides which of the two to take on his trip to Scotland, I don't think economy is going to matter one jot.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

KRIS CULMER

2019 VOLVO V90 D5 POWERPULSE INSCRIPTION PLUS AWD

VS

DANNY DAVIES

2013 BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT SPEED

Brief: Find the perfect car for a European road trip for under £35k

KC There's little I love more than a European road trip, so I well know that you need comfort, quietness, space, big cruising performance, a long range and an excellent stereo. Nothing therefore can beat this diesel Volvo. I'm getting a bit emotional just looking at it.

DD I completely agree with that list – but I'm not sure your V90 ticks all those boxes. I'd also be emotional with 231bhp, and not in a good way. That's why I've gone for a 616bhp W12 Bentley, which will supply all of the performance, comfort and luxury you could ever hope for.

KC The only place that will come in handy is on an autobahn. I assure you my 140mph will feel more than fast enough. More pertinently, I have space for bikes while you will be limited to a pair of boat shoes. Plus, at £34k, yours is £9k pricier – and you will need to refuel it *a lot*.

DD I was hoping you wouldn't bring that up… But no matter: a European road trip should feel glamorous and special, and that's exactly how life feels driving a Conti. Nothing wrong with boat shoes, either.

KC You want glamour and luxury? Then cower before my blond nappa leather and Bowers & Wilkins audio.

DD Cower?! My Naim sound system cost £6500, or more than all of your car's options put together.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

HYUNDAI i20 N

2022, 36,000 miles, £21,491

It may not have 4WD like the GR Yaris, but the 201bhp i20 N is also a fine example of the breed. It's as fun and engaging as a Ford Fiesta ST, plus this example has a solid service history and long MOT. It should hold its value well too, now you can't buy one new.

SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT

2012, 57,000 miles, £5695

This nippy 1.6-litre Swift Sport seems great value for money, with such a low mileage. The pictures suggest it's in great condition, and it won't need an MOT until next March. If you want a sporty and fun little runaround that's truly affordable, look no further.

ABARTH 500E TURISMO

2023, 3000 miles, £19,990

This 500e would have cost more than £30k new, so it seems a steal at £20k now. Yes, it's an EV, but we promise it's great fun to drive, with 152bhp and an agile chassis. Realistically, its range should be about 130-140 miles.

PEUGEOT 208 GTi

2014, 59,000 miles, £5000

Practical, agile and quick, this hot 208 is real affordable fun, and this example looks pretty tidy for its age and mileage, and the seller claims it drives really well. The alloys could do with a refurb, but aside from that this little Pug should serve you well.

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Steve Cropley
Matt Prior

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

New Dacia 1300s outside Mioveni factory in 1989

Original Dacia Duster was a rebadged ARO 10

Dictator Ceausescu drives the first-ever Dacia 1100 in 1968

The origins and early British exploits of Dacia

As the 1950s dawned, the recently installed communist government of Romania dictated that its population of peasant farmers be sent to work in factories. The industrialisation of the country was rapid – and a decade later, the ruling party decided to add vehicle manufacturing to their growing collection of heavy industries.

Recognising that Romanians lacked the required knowledge or experience to design and build a car of their own, the party sent a group of specialists abroad to learn how to make automotive electricals and set about buying a production licence for a modern family saloon from a Western manufacturer.

Between 1965 and 1967, six sent representatives to Bucharest for discussions. Britain's BMC offered its hugely successful Mini, Italy's Fiat and Alfa Romeo the retiring 1100 and new Giulia, and France's Renault and Peugeot the 10 and 204, both new. Meanwhile, America's Ford proposed a comprehensive 10-year industry-building project.

Romania's new general secretary, Nicolae Ceausescu, most fancied Renault, after the firm secretly flew out a pre-launch prototype 12 in a guarded crate for him to personally evaluate.

Alfa was particularly miffed about this, because Ceausescu announced his choice in the same week that his foreign affairs minister was visiting Italy to strike a deal for production of Giulias and Alfa buses.

A new firm, named UAP, would build Renaults in Mioveni, near the city of Pitesti, where a wartime IAR aeroplane factory had transitioned to making truck parts. There was a hitch, though: the tooling for the 12 wasn't yet ready. Renault offered the innovative 16 as an alternative, but the party deemed this too pricey. So the factory would have to start off making the older, rear-engined 8.

It was renamed the Dacia 1100 (Dacia was the name of Romania in antiquity), and efforts would be made to localise its supply chain.

The very first 1100 was driven off the line by Ceausescu in August 1968, and a year later it was joined by a rebadged 12, the Dacia 1300 – and Mioveni also started making parts for Renault. From around 30% initially, local content would rise to 100% through the 1970s. Production totalled about 20,000 cars annually, many of them exported to France.

A Dacia and an Oltcit at a Romanian car exhibition in 1986

Yorkshire firm TVI imported ARO 4x4s

Such was Dacia's success that in 1973 the party asked Renault about adding a smaller, more frugal car (the new 5, we would imagine) – but the answer was no. So instead it partnered Citroën, creating the Oltcit brand. A new factory was built in Craiova, opening in 1981 with production of the new Visa and Club superminis – the latter developed from an old proposal for a 2CV successor and sold abroad as the Axel.

None of this was reported by Autocar when it happened, due to the obfuscation of the Iron Curtain and the lack of relevance to British drivers.

That changed in 1981 with an announcement by Yorkshire company Tudor Vehicle Imports. TVI had begun life two years prior importing 4x4s and commercial vehicles made by Romania's ARO and TV firms, and now it was adding the Dacia 1300 saloon/estate to its dealerships.

"It is an ideal vehicle for the family man," said TVI's marketing director. "It compares favourably in size, power and fuel consumption with the Morris Ital but will be much more competitively priced."

This was part of a £10 million expansion plan, backed by the Romanian government taking a 75% share in TVI and providing a cash injection. A new factory was to be built in Brighouse to build Dacias from knocked-down kits, creating 400 jobs – and so many applied that the company was "unable to cope".

So it was disastrous when, merely months later, the party "suddenly seemed to lose their enthusiasm" and backed out of the plan, forcing TVI into receivership. It took legal action, but the result is unclear.

A Hampshire firm soon stepped in to import the 1300, renamed the Denem, to the great annoyance of embittered TVI boss Jack Wade – but the Dacia Car Co also slumped into receivership two years and 200 sales later. Presumably the Denem wasn't "very acceptable", after all.

But guess what? Our story doesn't end there. Yet another firm fancied a crack, this one from Wiltshire. And so in 1985, Autocar was able to conduct its first-ever Dacia road test (even if this Dacia was actually a rebadged ARO). It was a rough-and-ready 4x4, and it was called the Duster. Intrigued? See below...

KRIS CULMER

If you want to get lost in the archive...
Scan the QR code to read our full Dacia Duster 4x4 road test from 1985*.

*For three weeks from publication date

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ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of empirical road testing is the longest in the world. For more than a century, we have been verifying, scrutinising, describing and illustrating new cars in unparalleled detail. Driving impressions have always been a key part of this, around which the empirical tests have changed.

In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into that century of road testing with a subscription to the digital Autocar archive (visit themagazineshop.com/2025ED/ACA).

Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ 25.3.09 Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆ 9.8.23 A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.14 Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪ 29.3.17 Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆ 3.1.18 Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆ 9.1.19 A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ 28.6.23 Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ 16.5.18 Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪ 9.3.22 The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆ 15.11.23 Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★ 9.10.19 Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★⯪ 18.9.24 Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ 21.11.18 Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish ★★★★⯪ 26.3.25 Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆ 30.11.22 A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.19 Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆ 18.11.20 Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant ★★★★☆ 14.2.18 A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 15.1.25 Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 5.1.22 Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★⯪☆ 16.4.25 Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆ 5.2.25 Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 11.7.18 Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 17.6.20 Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.6.19 A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 2.6.21 A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆ 9.11.16 Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ 20.3.19 More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆ 7.7.21 Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line ★★★⯪☆ 14.5.25 Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.24 EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 12.8.15 Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.10.16 A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ 26.9.18 Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ 30.12.15 Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT ★★★★☆ 2.4.25 Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪ 18.5.16 Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ 24.4.24 Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ 22.12.21 Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪ 19.4.23 Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆ 16.4.25 Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪ 17.8.22 Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44

BMW

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★⯪☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport	★★★★⯪	2.3.22	Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★⯪☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey	★★★★☆	11.6.25	Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-

DS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★⯪☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500C 1.2 Pop	★★★★☆	5.8.09	Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.	13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★⯪☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★⯨ 20.2.19 Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19 Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★⯨ 25.3.20 The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma Gen-E Select ★★★★☆ 4.6.25 Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.	7.2	7.2	-	3.4	179
Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21 Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★⯨☆ 23.10.24 Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★⯨☆ 24.6.20 Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆ 23.6.21 Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆ 27.4.22 Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse ★★★⯨☆ 20.11.24 Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★⯨☆ 10.7.24 Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24 Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★⯨ 14.6.23 Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-

GENESIS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★⯨☆ 10.11.21 Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80 ★★★⯨☆ 12.10.22 Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22 Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★⯨☆ 15.9.21 Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★⯨☆☆ 1.2.23 Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance ★★★⯨☆ 26.8.20 More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★⯨☆ 7.10.20 Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT ★★★★⯨ 25.10.17 Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★⯨☆ 24.11.21 Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23 EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20 Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★⯨☆ 24.2.21 Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N ★★★★⯨ 25.8.21 N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE ★★★⯨☆ 13.9.17 Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance ★★★⯨☆ 28.12.17 Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★⯨☆ 7.6.23 Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23 Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆ 17.3.21 Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24 A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo ★★★⯨☆ 12.6.19 Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★⯨☆ 20.9.23 Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAECOO

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★⯨☆☆ 9.4.25 Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41

JAGUAR

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★⯨ 1.7.15 Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★⯨☆ 17.4.19 Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★⯨☆ 11.4.18 Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★⯨ 12.9.18 Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR ★★★★⯨ 24.7.19 Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯨ 1.12.21 Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆ 29.4.20 The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit ★★★⯨☆ 24.1.24 Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯨☆ 3.10.18 Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22 Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯨☆ 28.10.15 Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk ★★★☆☆ 30.6.21 Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland ★★★★☆ 10.4.19 Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★☆☆ 14.9.16 Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-
Torres 1.5T K40 AWD ★★⯨☆☆ 4.6.25 Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.	11.3	12.0	1661	35.0	-

KIA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★⯨☆ 11.9.24 No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2 ★★★★☆ 29.8.18 Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-

TOP 3

BEST CHINESE CARS

1 Xpeng G6

2 MG 4 EV

3 MG HS

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1987 PEUGEOT 309 GTi

Family hatchback turns sporty in its third year on sale, gaining the new 1.9-litre engine of the wonderful 205 GTi. "It offers the performance and handling of that car but with more space and greater refinement. The perfect pick-me-up."

Price £10,355
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1905cc, petrol
Power 130bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 119lb ft at 4750rpm
Weight 1173kg
0-60mph 8.7sec
0-100mph 26.0sec
Top speed 122mph
Economy 28.3mpg

1951 AUSTIN A40 SPORTS CONVERTIBLE

British firm turns its first post-war saloon into a roadster of "decidedly modern appearance. Good fun could obviously be had in competitions of the more restrained kind. Although it has the touch of the sporting about it, it is in every way an admirable general-purpose car."

Price £818
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1200cc, petrol
Power 50bhp at 5000rpm
Torque 61lb ft at 3000rpm
Weight 987kg
0-30mph 6.7sec
0-60mph 27.4sec
Top speed 77mph
Economy 34mpg

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*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★⯪☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★⯪☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★⯪☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★⯪☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★⯪☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★⯪☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★⯪	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★⯪	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★⯪	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★⯪	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★⯪	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★⯪☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★⯪	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★⯪	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★⯪	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★⯪☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★⯪	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★⯪☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★⯪☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★⯪☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★⯪☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★⯪	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT	★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R	★★★⯪☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★⯪☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★⯪☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★⯪☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★⯪☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★⯪☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★⯪☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★⯪	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
750S ★★★★☆ 19.6.24 McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura ★★★★⯪ 19.10.22 Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider ★★★★⯪ 6.11.24 Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT ★★★⯪☆ 27.1.21 Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★⯪ 4.3.20 AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate ★★★☆☆ 31.7.24 Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé ★★★★⯪ 13.3.19 AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé ★★★⯪☆ 21.6.23 Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition ★★★★☆ 8.6.22 Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition ★★★★☆ 2.10.24 Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★⯪☆ 14.10.20 Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★⯪☆ 26.7.23 Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé ★★★⯪☆ 14.8.24 Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive ★★★★☆ 24.5.23 Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium ★★★☆☆ 5.8.20 Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport ★★★★☆ 3.4.19 In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★☆☆ 21.8.19 Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line ★★★★⯪ 4.5.22 Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 3.1.24 An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus ★★★★⯪ 19.3.25 Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★⯪☆ 4.1.23 Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class ★★★★☆ 7.5.25 Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV ★★★⯪☆ 6.3.24 Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★⯪ 6.4.22 Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★☆☆ 17.11.21 Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★⯪☆ 16.9.20 Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★⯪☆ 18.5.22 A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★⯪☆ 13.9.23 Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★⯪☆ 12.2.20 Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line ★★★★☆ 17.7.19 Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 25.9.24 Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★☆ 13.11.24 Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★⯪☆ 12.6.24 Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★☆ 5.4.23 Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive ★★★⯪☆ 25.11.20 MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★☆☆ 22.1.25 Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-

MINI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
John Cooper Works ★★★★☆ 14.5.25 A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive ★★★⯪☆ 17.4.24 Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive ★★★⯪☆ 8.1.25 Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four ★★★⯪☆ 12.8.20 Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six ★★★★☆ 10.4.24 The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3 ★★★★⯪ 9.11.22 Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★⯪☆ 29.1.20 Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna ★★★★☆ 28.7.21 Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★⯪☆ 26.10.22 Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna ★★★★☆ 22.2.23 Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort ★★⯪☆☆ 20.11.24 Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium ★★★★☆ 6.5.20 Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★☆ 25.5.22 A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 11.10.23 Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto ★★★★☆ 24.10.18 Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 8.7.20 This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE ★★★★☆ 5.5.21 Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-

TOP 3

BEST BMWs

1 BMW 3 Series

2 BMW i7

3 BMW iX

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-2008 GT Line	★★★⯪☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line	★★★⯪☆	18.1.17	In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★⯪☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★⯪☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★⯪	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★⯪	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Spyder	★★★★⯪	1.4.20	Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★⯪	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★⯪	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★⯪	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
911 Carrera GTS	★★★★⯪	5.3.25	Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
Macan Turbo	★★★★⯪	4.6.14	Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★⯪☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★⯪	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★⯪☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★⯪	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

BEST OFF-ROADERS

1 Land Rover Defender

2 Jeep Wrangler

3 Toyota Land Cruiser

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★⯪	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five	★★★★⯪	12.3.25	Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno	★★★⯪☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★⯪☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★⯪☆	13.10.21	Eminently sensible but unspectacular.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★⯪☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost	★★★★⯪	13.1.21	Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.	4.7	3.8	2490	28.5	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★⯪	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★⯪	19.7.17	Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★⯪☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★⯪	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★⯪☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★⯪☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition	★★★★⯪	19.3.25	Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★⯪☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★⯪☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★⯪☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★⯪☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★⯪	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156

		0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Long Range ★★★★☆ 14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD ★★★★☆ 23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D ★★★★⯪ 20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid ★★★⯪☆ 2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D ★★★★☆ 15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

		0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition ★★★⯪☆ 11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design ★★★★☆ 23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack ★★★★★ 3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports ★★★★☆ 5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design ★★★★☆ 23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision ★★★⯪☆ 18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible ★★★★☆ 21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium ★★★★☆ 16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro ★★★★☆ 14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport ★★★⯪☆ 1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

		0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto ★★★⯪☆ 22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line ★★★⯪☆ 5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite ★★★☆☆ 7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto ★★★⯪☆ 12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav ★★★☆☆ 22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy ★★★⯪☆ 27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

		0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE ★★★★⯪ 31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+ ★★★★☆ 1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG ★★★★⯪ 22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style ★★★★⯪ 23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI ★★★⯪☆ 25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R ★★★★☆ 14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life ★★★★☆ 31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line ★★★⯪☆ 27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake ★★★⯪☆ 9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match ★★★★⯪ 13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG ★★★★⯪ 24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG ★★⯪☆☆ 10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line ★★★⯪☆ 22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max ★★★⯪☆ 27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech ★★★⯪☆ 8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance ★★★⯪☆ 5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG ★★★★☆ 3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style ★★★★☆ 8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro ★★★★☆ 8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600 ★★★⯪☆ 2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB ★★★☆☆ 30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance ★★★★☆ 13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

		0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus ★★★☆☆ 1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate ★★★⯪☆ 13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition ★★★★⯪ 7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design ★★★⯪☆ 5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum ★★★★☆ 17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto ★★★★☆ 27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design ★★★★⯪ 21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design ★★★★⯪ 11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

		0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Smart #5 Brabus Winter
Big performance SUV with two motors, four-wheel drive and 637bhp, plus a 335-mile range.

Fiat Grande Panda Hybrid September
Quasi-rugged retro supermini gets a three-cylinder 1.2-litre petrol engine with an ISG.

Audi A6 Avant November
That this comfy exec estate is being launched with a 2.0-litre diesel engine speaks volumes.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
MORNINGS AT LE MANS

BY JAMES ATTWOOD

Common logic holds that the Le Mans 24 Hours is at its most magical at night. And sure, it's incredible watching hypercars blast past in the dark at close to 200mph – but the rest of it can be a bit much.

On Saturday night, the Circuit de la Sarthe morphs into a big party venue, and it can be an overwhelming sensory experience. The humidity that can build over Le Mans in mid-June clings on after nightfall, making it stifling and uncomfortable. And there's a mass of humanity everywhere, drinking, partying and swirling in and out of the spectator zones, funfair and campsites. With all this and the bright lights, loud noises and smells of various foods being cooked, it's loud, bustling and boisterous.

For someone who isn't much of a partying type, it's a lot, and I'm always relieved to escape the mayhem.

Besides, there's a much better time to enjoy Le Mans. You just need to get up early: because compared with Saturday night, Sunday morning at Le Mans is a different world – and, in my mind, an immeasurably better, more pleasurable one.

The humidity fades overnight, and as the sun breaks under clear skies, it's usually fresh and welcoming. And, aside from the 50-plus high-powered race cars roaring round, it's peaceful. The throngs of fans have melted away, aside from a handful of fellow early starters (and the odd late-night reveller asleep on the ground), so you have your run of prime spectator spots.

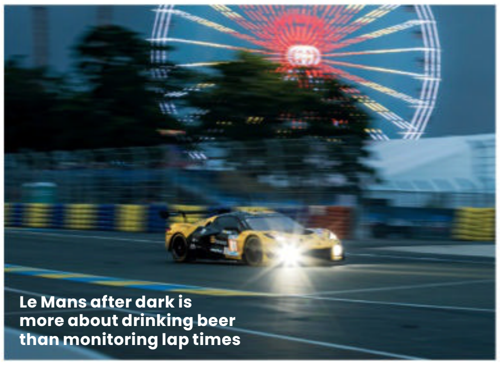
And the spectating is amazing. On Saturday night the race is essentially the backdrop to a huge party, but on Sunday morning it regains centre stage. It's a time for purists. By this stage, the 'story' of the race has been established, so you know which cars to keep an eye on and which gaps to monitor.

Cool temperatures mean fast lap times, and even if the race has settled down, it's far too early for anyone to back off. You can study each driver's lines, listen to the differences in engine notes and appreciate the striking difference in performance between the classes.

It's also a great time to realise just how tough this race is. By dawn on Sunday, the cars are approaching two-thirds distance, so there are 'only' nine or 10 hours left. That doesn't sound much in the context of a 24-hour race, but that's still five grands prix. That's when you appreciate how challenging a 24-hour race is and what an experience it is to witness – especially in a calm, quiet moment of solitude.

In a few hours, the temperature will ramp up, the spectator areas will start to fill in readiness for the finish and Le Mans will start to feel like one of the world's great mass spectator events again. My tip: get up early and enjoy the calm while you can.

Yes, some people really can sleep while a horde of racers go round them at full blast



Le Mans after dark is more about drinking beer than monitoring lap times

> **"It's a different world – and an immeasurably more pleasurable one"**

What we did this week

OFF THE RECORD

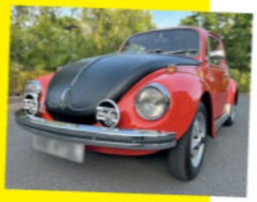
I now own this rather nice print of an Impreza WRX. It's the sleeve artwork for indie band Sports Team's latest LP – and the disc itself is styled after an alloy. I've never driven an Impreza, but the track 'I'm In Love (Subaru)' resoundingly informs me that "it feels like driving a throne, of immaculate leather and chrome, unrivalled king of the road". Excellent sax solo, too. **KRIS CULMER**

CARS AND COVVY

Every summer for the past few years, Coventry's ring road has been closed for time trials and various car events spring up under the banner of Motofest. This year it took a break, but there were still various displays, including a concours in the old cathedral. I had a great time. **ILLYA VERPRAET**

BEE IN MY (OLD) BONNET

Regular readers might remember my beloved 1972 Volkswagen Beetle, which I wrote about last year before promptly selling. I'm surprised to see it listed for sale already – and gutted because a) it's apparently worth £2000 more now and b) the bonnet has been painted black. Yes, it needed a respray, but I would have kept it original. Am I wrong? **FELIX PAGE**



4 PINTS
THE NIGHT
BEFORE

One in five drink drive prosecutions happen the morning after[A], many unaware they still have alcohol left in their system from the night before. AlcoSense quickly and accurately tells you your blood alcohol level, so you don't become one of them.

The Telegraph

"a fresh level of accuracy in consumer breath testing"[B]

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ELITE
excel
pro
0.8 ‰BAC
0.28 mg/L
0.27 mg/L
0.31 mg/L
Sober in... 5h 15m
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alcosense lite 3
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A: Source: DfT Road Accident Data 2015, B: Review of the AlcoSense Pro, 24/12/15. Intellectual Property: www.alcosense.co.uk/ip. © AlcoSense Laboratories, part of Now Group UK Ltd, Unit 3 MEC, Cordwallis Street, Maidenhead SL6 7BE

NEW TERRAMAR
TE74 MAR
CUPRA

THERE IS NO SECOND

Winning is a state of mind. It's that voice in your head that pushes you to be a better version of yourself. Victory becomes reality for those who dare to encounter the new CUPRA Terramar's shark nose design, sporty bucket seats, and coast-to-coast rear LED lights. For those who know that, no matter what they do, there is no second.

Official fuel consumption for the CUPRA Terramar range mpg (litres/100km) combined: 32.1 – 706.2 (8.8 - 0.4). Combined CO_2 emissions: 199-10g/km. Figures include the following models: CUPRA Terramar petrol and e-HYBRID. Plug-in e-HYBRID vehicles require mains electricity for charging. Figures for e-HYBRID vehicles were obtained using a combination of battery power and fuel. Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption, CO_2 and electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. Data correct as at March 2025.